

Running head: STUDENT CHOICE AND VOICE

STUDENT CHOICE AND VOICE: A TRANSITION TO CHOICE-BASED ART
EDUCATION

By

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A.B. in Art History, University of Georgia, 2013

An Applied Project Report Submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art
of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ART EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2019

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MAJOR PROFESSOR

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DATE

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(Under the Direction of Lynn Sanders-Bustle)

ABSTRACT

This applied project, *Student Choice and Voice: A Transition to Choice-Based Art Education*, studies the transition from a teacher-directed art classroom to a choice-based, student-centered art classroom in an elementary public school setting. The impact of choice on students' learning experiences in art is addressed through students' shared perceptions. Inferences are made pertaining to how choice in a choice-based art classroom empowers students to build agency, strengthen creativity, and self-express.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I am a second-year elementary school art teacher who interacts with close to 1,000 students over the course of six days. I have six classes that range from kindergarten to fifth grade each day with 25-30 students in each class. I never thought I would interact with that many students on a regular basis, nor did I know I was capable of memorizing all of their names. Pine Elementary School is a public elementary school located in a rural southeastern town in the United States. While our school may be in a remote location, our initiatives have a great impact on our students, families, and our community. This year our students and teachers are exploring the following question through hands-on application: How can I show environmental stewardship and sustainability in my community? Each grade level takes ownership of one of the following assets throughout the year to explore and practice environmental stewardship and sustainability: aquaponics, the greenhouse, gardening, a farm to school initiative, hens, goats, bees, composting, recycling, etc. Students learn the direct impact we can have on our school's population and our community through these experiences and responsibilities.

I am an advocate of our school's initiative as it relates to choice-based art education and transitioned to choice-based art education at the beginning of my second year teaching by following the resources provided by the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) organization (Teaching for Artistic Behavior, 2019). This was the best decision I could have made for myself and for my students, as it is not product based, but instead process-based and supports the creative process. As an art specialist, I teach art techniques, concepts, history, procedures, and model artistic behaviors so that students can then use the tools and resources to explore and discover, as artists, what art means to them on a personal level.

As I have researched, learned, and transitioned to choice-based art education and teach for artistic behaviors, I have noticed this approach to learning appears to improve students' problem solving and critical thinking skills, strengthen their creativity, and develop a mindset that prepares them to be successful in life. In addition, these skills are directly transferrable into other subject areas, life outside of the classroom walls, and real-world experiences. However, the extent to which this happens and how was unknown. I wanted to know more.

Statement of the Problem

To learn how choice-based art education builds agency and strengthens creativity and self-expression, I looked closely at the perceptions and artwork of seven students in my art class. I was interested in learning their point of view regarding their experience transitioning from a teacher-directed learning environment last year to one that is student-centered this year. Through the analysis of researcher field notes, students' perceptions shared during interviews, and students' artwork, I was able to better understand students' perceptions of how choice in a choice-based art education classroom empowers students to build agency, strengthen their creativity, and self-express.

Significance of the Problem

This interpretive study is significant because it examines the value of student choice and aims to better understand how choice promotes agency in the classroom. Students are at the center of what shapes their learning environment, and this allows their environment to evolve organically or through intentional conversations about what students want and need. It is one of the few times students have at school to strengthen their creativity, generate their own ideas, see ideas through, guide their own learning, amp up their voices through authentic art making, as well as practice being self-sufficient. Choice is in their best interest.

During my first year of teaching, it was not long before I noticed a waning of student interest and engagement in the projects I had planned for us to create. They were exciting ideas to me, but almost 1,000 people did not always agree. And of course they did not, which in hindsight is painstakingly obvious. We are all so different, with varying interests and backgrounds. Students finished their work at varying times and I would provide filler worksheets for early finishers. I remember when a class would enter the art studio, there would be at least one or more students in each class, without fail, that would ask me “What are we doing today?” or “Do we get to paint today?”. I will use the term art studio rather than art classroom because it is more descriptive and in line with viewing the child as artist who creates in studio centers, which speaks to a choice-based, TAB mindset (Douglas and Jaquith, 2018). I soon felt a sense of inauthenticity and an enormous amount of pressure to pique every student’s interests with the projects I imagined. It quickly became evident that something was not working. Something needed to change. As a second-year art teacher, making the transition to choice-based art education has created an authentic learning environment for students.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Douglas and Jaquith (2018), leading advocates of choice-based art education and founders of the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) organization, eloquently describe this approach to teaching art:

By respecting the child as artist, the art teacher sets the stage for creative exploration.

Teachers encourage children to build confidence as artists by acknowledging artistic behaviors and providing circumstances for their continued development. Increased confidence leads to actions, which, in turn, stimulate initiative. Repeated over time, these spiraling actions result in artistic growth. (Douglas & Jaquith, 2018, p. 4)

Beginning in the 1970s, a choice-based art education approach to teaching and learning provided a large population of students access and choice regarding a variety of media (Douglas & Jaquith, 2018, p. 1). It was designed to provide an open-ended curriculum that offers students a wide range of possibilities that aim to satisfy each student's interest and meet each student's needs. Douglas (Gaw & Fralick, 2018), pioneer of choice-based art education and the founder of TAB, discovered choice-based pedagogy when teaching close to 1,000 students with a terrible schedule, to this I can very much relate, with very little resources. Douglas (Gaw & Fralick, 2018) explained that TAB came about from a multitude of problems, like not having enough materials for all students at once or students finishing projects at different times. But it was not until a colleague, a practicing artist, critiqued her projects and provided a plan for running a summer camp together where children had multiple choices. Douglas (Gaw & Fralick, 2018) went on to describe her experience of running this camp:

That was so much better than what was going on in class that I imported it into my year's work. So I guess that's how it started, really, in the early 70's, and quite a bit not what I planned. It was really just a survival mechanism initially and then after awhile you think, oh, well maybe this is actually a good thing. So that's how it started.

Douglas and Jaquith (2018) explain Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) as a philosophy, which supports a choice-based art classroom and the development of artistic minds through choice. According to Douglas and Jaquith (2018), "If we wish for our students to do the work of artists, we must offer them the opportunity to behave as artists, think as artists, and perform as artists. If not in our classrooms, then where?" (p. 8). The values of TAB are not new to the art classroom and are related to the work of other scholars who have written about the importance of these artistic behaviors (Douglas and Jaquith, 2018), creative processes (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1964), or as they are called by Hogan, Hetland, Jacquith, & Winner, 2018; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan 2007, 2013; Seidel et al., 2009; Jaquith, 2019, "The Studio Habits of Mind." Studio habits as described by Hogan et al. (2018) include: (1) "Develop Craft: Technique and Studio Practice"; (2) "Engage and Persist: Finding Passion and Sticking with It"; (3) "Envision: Imagining and Planning"; (4) "Express: Finding Meaning"; (5) "Observe: Looking Closely"; (6) "Reflect: Question & Explain and Evaluate"; (7) "Stretch and Explore: Play, Use Mistakes, and Discover"; (8) "Understand Art Worlds: Domain and Communities" (p. 8-47). This kind of thinking already occurs in the art studio with or without explicitly recalling the Studio Habits of Mind; however, acknowledging these concepts helps students to intentionally utilize them as they actively practice Studio Thinking. Doing so guides them to be cognizant of these concepts as well as take ownership over their own learning (Hogan et al., 2018, p. 9). Jaquith (2019) explains the overlaps between TAB and Studio Thinking:

When you look closely at Studio Thinking, you can see that it is embedded in all approaches to art education. These thinking dispositions are constantly emerging in your art classes. Though you may call Envision by another name, like “imagine;” or you describe the habit of Stretch & Explore as “trying something new;” most or all of these habits are being practiced every day in your classroom. Use the framework to see which ones you emphasize most and which ones least in order to get an idea of how your students are developing in their artistic thinking. (blog post)

This is supported by Seidel et al. (2009) who stressed the importance of students having the opportunity and space at school to simply be themselves for personal development, which they are rarely afforded the time for this at school.

One way I can guide my students is to observe where they are in the creative process, ask guiding questions of them to help us define and refine the stage they are in, which creates momentum into the next stage of the process. To run an effective and efficient art studio, both Gardener (1982) and Rogers and Freiberg (1994) discuss the importance of asking questions not of ourselves but of the students to understand how we can help them “find the resources – the people, the experiences, the learning facilities, the books, the knowledge in myself – that will help them learn in ways that will provide answers to the things that concern them, the things they are eager to learn” (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p. 170). An open-ended curriculum, which bolsters the creative process, gives way to exciting, thoughtful, yet spontaneous happenings in students’ art. To better understand the complexities of the creative process, Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) outlined defining aspects of the creative process and creative thinking. They claimed there are eight key factors at play throughout the creative process: (1) “*sensitivity* – a sensitivity to problems, to attitudes and feelings of other people, and to the experiences of living”

(p. 7); (2) “*fluency*. This is the ability to produce a large number of ideas in a short period of time, to think rapidly and freely” (p. 8); (3) “*flexibility*, the ability to adjust quickly to new situations or to change rapidly in one’s thinking (p. 8); (4) “*originality*. This is the ability to think of new or novel responses and is the opposite of the usual or accepted” (p. 8); (5) “the capacity to *redefine* or *reorganize*. To be able to rearrange ideas and shift the uses and functions or objects, or to see them in a new light” (p. 8); (6) “the ability to *abstract*, the skill of analyzing the various parts of a problem or seeing specific relationships” (p.9); (7) “the ability to *synthesize*, or the ability to combine several elements into a new form or whole” (p. 9); (8) “the ability to *organize*, that is, the ability to put parts together in a meaningful way (p. 9). Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) explain that many of these abilities fall under the term divergent thinking in that “there are no right answers, and any number of possible solutions to problems or any number of outcomes in painting or drawing are correct” (p.10). As an art specialist, I want to be in tune with each student’s unique approach to the creative process, to keep a pulse on the creativeness of our art studio environment, and to help stimulate creative juices any way I can. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) argue that in order to be mindful of this, there are three key factors to consider: (1) one’s own personality, creativeness, sensitivity, and ability to maintain flexible relationships all impact the environment of the art studio; (2) the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes; (3) understanding students’ needs based on relationships built (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1964, p. 11).

These inquiries help me to better understand how teaching for artistic behaviors in a choice-based art education classroom empower students to self-express, build agency, and connect personal experiences to their artwork. In this following section, I present literature in two categories as they relate to choice-based art education: (1) Choice and Student Agency and

(2) Creativity and Self-Expression.

Choice and Student Agency

We have discovered a **cycle of inquiry** that constantly re-emerges: an encounter between children and materials coincides with their imaginations or interest, is recorded by a teacher or saved in an artifact, and is retold by children and teachers, which becomes a provocation to pursue the encounter into the future. It is a continuous cycle of perching and flying. Like birds landing and taking off, children and teachers survey the terrain and ascend in order to gain a new perspective. (Gandini, 2005, p. 53)

I include this description to note the similarities between the choice-based art education and the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching. The relationship between children and the materials they choose to express themselves is essential for authentic artmaking. Both a Reggio Emilia atelier and a choice-based art studio are similar in their design and purpose for students to easily access the materials and resources they need to build agency. And from developing a strong sense of agency, creativity and self-expression emerge.

Students learn that being an artist comes with responsibilities in the art studio. Students strengthen autonomy by taking care of the art materials they love to use, returning materials to their home, cleaning the art studio, ensuring artwork goes in the correct place so they can easily locate their artwork next class, and choosing the subject matter of their art based on personal interests. It is essential that we as art specialists and artists remain sensitive to what is unfolding before us. We must practice sensitivity, defined by Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) as a factor of the creative process, and “use eyes not only for seeing but for observing, ears not only for hearing but for listening, and hands not only for touching but for feeling” (p. 7).

It is important to note the connection between choice-based art education and multimodality as it relates to student agency. Douglas, Crowe, Jaquith, and Joseph (2008) claim that “choice-based art education supports multiple modes of learning and teaching” (p. 38) and, as previously mentioned, Douglas and Jaquith (2018) state that “choice-based art education serves as a methodology to provide large numbers of students with choices in media and technique” (p. 1). What this means to students is how they choose a material and develop a technique is crucial to how they self-express. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) state “a technique is an individual’s use of materials as a means of expression” (p. 34). Since one way students build agency is through their freedom to choose what they want to create, students take charge of their learning, feel a greater sense of ownership over their artwork, and take responsibility and care of the materials they choose to use to create their artwork. Choice-based art education provides students an open-ended curriculum and a wide range of materials that, as Gandini (2005) states, “offer openings and pathways by and through which children may enter the world of knowledge” (p. 113). In the art studio, modes of learning are comparable to art materials students choose from to create their artwork in a meaningful way. Students choose from a variety of materials, e.g., paint, drawing materials, collage, clay, etc., to depict a personal message. Griffin, Rowsell, Winters, Vietgen, McLauchlan, and McQueen-Fuentes (2017) demonstrate how art and multimodality work together to encourage students to take charge of their own learning through three projects called the *Community Arts Zone* (CAZ) projects. In these projects, students share their thoughts on any subject in a way that is meaningful to each individual, much like in our art studio. Students chose from one or more modes (materials) that they felt best encapsulated what they wanted to say, creating a complex, layered, and meaningful

message. Griffin et al. (2017) goes on to explain how students' artwork and written artist statements were paired to communicate students' reflection surrounding self-identity.

Selfe (2009) suggests teachers promote student agency when they are given the opportunity to explore multiple modes to enhance their learning. Students have the same freedom in the art studio to explore multiple art materials as well and pursue new understandings. The art studio is a constructivist space in that it is learner-centered and I try my best to help "students to search rather than follow" (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p. 103). Jaquith and Hathaway (2012) note the freedom to choose from many media centers allows students the opportunity to fine-tune their expertise with any given medium. Students may spend months revisiting, practicing, and refining their abilities in one medium before they decide to explore another center. Jaquith and Hathaway (2012) liken the approach of the choice-based art studio and the advocacy of student agency to that of the Montessori philosophy:

This approach most closely follows Montessori's ideas of freedom and interest. The children have autonomy to choose from personal interests, which can stem from their academic work, books, they have read, family time, or a desire to learn a new technique or medium. Students are free to repeat and repeat, refining process and craft as they do in other areas of their lives. (p. 52)

Students and I recite our mantra at the beginning of each class, "I am an artist. This is my art studio. I will take care of my art. I will take care of my studio." I respect students as the artists and I expect them to act like artists, which means they have responsibilities in the art studio in regards to the maintenance of our art studio and being self-directed learners. Jaquith and Hathaway (2012) claim that over time these practices build confidence and develop autonomy (Jaquith & Hathaway, 2012, p. 21). When students recognize themselves as artists, it promotes a

sense of identity and boosts their self-esteem. Seidel et al., (2009) claim that the arts have an impact on how students view themselves. “[Students] develop an expressive voice, an important outcome of arts education is to help all children grow as individuals. From developing students’ imagination and self-esteem to encouraging their self-awareness, engaging with the arts can affect how youth see themselves” (p. 38). The literature helps me to examine how choice amplifies student voice. I am not; however, “giving” students a voice, as they already possess a voice. Allison (2007) states this problem is found in some cases:

If, as the new paradigm for childhood studies suggest (James & Prout, 1990), children need to be given a voice in research, the implication is that children are somehow disabled or prevented from speaking out, and that, therefore, they need a helping hand. (p. 262)

Creativity and Self-Expression

Do I have the courage and the humility to nurture creative ideas in my students? Do I have the tolerance and humanity to accept the annoying, occasionally defiant, occasionally oddball questions of some of those who have creative ideas? Can I make a place for the creative person? (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p. 17)

The artistic processes students undergo in the art studio allow them to create their own avenues of exploration. Students learn to listen to their instincts, move forward with their ideas, persist, and reflect. This process and practice of ongoing decision making, problem solving, and critical thinking strengthens students’ creativity and their ability to visually communicate their thoughts. Aldous (2014) states, “Evidence is accumulating to indicate an important role for both cognitive and non-cognitive processing in problem solving, decision making and learning. It is also pointing to an important role in the process of creativity” (p. 782). Nijstad, De Dreu,

Rietzschel, and Baas (2010) claim that while the ability to generate multiple ideas is a creative behavior, it is not the only pathway to creativity. They suggest that persistence plays a role in ideation and will give way to creative thought if practiced regularly. Students practice persistence each time they come to art. Many students practice creativity by the number of ideas they have or solutions to problems they encounter in their work. Many students are unsure of what to try and afraid of taking chances, seeing failure as an end result instead of an opportunity for growth. Many students self-express through abstraction, colors, and mark making. This is seen throughout all grade levels as students explore personal curiosities in their own way with varying levels of sophistication depending on the time spent developing their craftsmanship with a particular medium. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) discuss the boundless possibilities for self-expression, the space needed for the creative process to occur, and the opportunity for students to grow through exploration of subject matter and materials:

To provide the opportunity for a child to grow by means of his art experiences, to develop the confidence and sensitivity so important for self-expression, to provide a range of materials and the environmental setting so important for creative activities, to provide the stimulation and motivation for the developing awareness of his environment, and to provide the encouragement and approval for the creative act – all these responsibilities rest squarely upon the shoulders of the teacher. (p. 113)

I have witnessed my students' progress in many ways since my time implementing choice-based art education and teaching for artistic behavior rather than requiring students to complete a project imagined by me. It is my aim to maintain a space where students engage in authentic artmaking. To develop goals and concepts in an art program's curriculum that promote creativity and authenticity, Douglas and Jaquith (2018) encourage art teachers to consider the

following guiding question: “*What do artists do?*” (p. 14). I demonstrate techniques, procedures, present art concepts and art history at the beginning of class, and then students carry on with their own projects. I view and respect students as artists with ideas and interests of their own, and I know students continue to construct their knowledge from my demonstrations, storing away information to remerge and recall at a time when needed, as well as constructing knowledge from their own experiences. This is a key studio practice and Studio Habit of Mind that develops students’ craft (Hogan et al., 2018, p. 14-16).

There are many purposes art education serves, and Seidel et al., (2009) state that strengthening creativity is a main objective of visual arts education. Everyone has the capacity to be creative and creativity is strengthened when there is freedom to have original thought and space to promote the exploration of those ideas. Runco and Acar (2010) and Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) claim that the ability to think divergently requires time to practice being creative, that is the generation of many ideas (fluency) and a variety (flexibility) of original ideas (originality) (p. 147). When teachers guide students to take ownership of their learning and allow students the space to have original thoughts and ideas, students strengthen their ability to construct knowledge in a way that suits their interests and is meaningful to them. Seidel et al., (2009) claim:

An important outcome of arts education is to help students grow as individuals by teaching in ways that are sensitive to each student’s needs and interests... This kind of guidance, like many forms of mentorship, encourages students to move beyond just “doing the assignment” and toward taking full responsibility for – owning – their work. (p. 33)

I have noticed a shift from students' need for my approval to a need for their own approval. The expectations I do lay out for students deal with developing their artistic behaviors towards a growth mindset wherein we understand our process is far more important than a product, e.g., work on artwork at least two meetings or more. Other expectations pertain to the care of our art studio and the materials with which we have the privilege to use to express ourselves.

In addition to the choices students make in regards to media and subject matter, students reflect on their artistic decisions and further express themselves through writing artist statements. Student write artist statements when they complete their artwork. Students' artwork and artist statements could be likened to two different modes of expression that when paired together create a powerful relationship of self-expression, by way of visual and written communication. Adoniou (2013) studies the interrelationship between drawing and writing. Adoniou's (2013) bases the study on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) hypothesis that drawing and writing work together to create a powerful learning experience. It is also a key aspect of the Studio Habits of Mind wherein students practice studio thinking and artistic behaviors (Hogan et al., 2018; Douglas and Jaquith, 2018) through reflection; a time to explain, question, and evaluate their creative process, deepening their understanding of their habits of mind, artistic behaviors, and overall process. Sometimes students ask why they have to write an artist statement, to which I explain that it is an important time in the creative process to reflect on what they created, why they created it, and how they created it. Furthermore, I explain that there will be viewers of their artwork, if they choose to display their work, and the viewer will be curious to learn more about the artist's thoughts, feelings, intentions, process, and so on. An artist statement is an artist's opportunity to further express these aspects of their artwork. Artwork paired with an artist's reflection creates a powerful message.

...The arts provide a privileged and possibly unique avenue by which to express the ideas, feelings, and concepts of greatest moment to them. Only in this way can individuals come to grips with themselves and express in ways that are accessible to others their own vision of the world. In the end, the artistic achievement emerges as intensely personal *and* inherently social – an act that arises from the most profound levels of one’s own person and yet is directed to others in one’s culture. (Gardner, 1982, p. 102)

Each student has a unique background, complex experiences, and, as Brooks and Brooks (1999) explain, a point of view that needs to be respected and understood to create relevant, individualized instruction that will prompt students to connect to their learning and construct meaning on a deeper level (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p. 60). Selfe (2009) explains the significance of students’ messages communicated through their work and the multiple ways in which students choose to create based on the choices afforded to them:

We need to learn from [students’] motivated efforts to communicate with each other, for themselves and for others, often in resistance to the world we have created for them. We need to respect the rhetorical sovereignty of young people from different backgrounds, communities, colors, and cultures to observe and understand the rhetorical choices they are making, and to offer them new ways of making meaning, new choices, new ways of accomplishing their goals. (p. 642)

When teachers encourage students to explore inquires, and media in the art studio, that spark interest and joy for them, students become intrinsically engaged, take ownership of their learning, gain an authentic learning experience, and as Seidel et al., (2009) state, “increase their intrinsic motivation to learn and pursue excellence – both in and outside of the arts” (p. 26) because students have connected with their learning on a personal level. Castro (2012) explains

the complexities of students' learning experiences as "as a learning system, adapting, shaping, and being shaped by each other" (p. 158-160). The decisions students make to create their artwork stems from their personal life experiences and this connection between the two inspires others and dialogue emerges as a result of their experiences and choices. As a result of freedom in the art studio for students to self-express based on their own choices, these connections between their personal lives and art can come to fruition, and "[art] enables students to fulfill the purpose of connecting with others, to "cultivate" and "express humanity." (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 26).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In this interpretive inquiry project, I studied the art and perceptions of 7 of my students, Hal, Harry, Ernest, Nadine, Eve, June, and Jo. Through the analysis of researcher field notes, interview transcripts, and the students' artwork, I was able to better understand how choice in a choice-based art education classroom empowers students to build agency, strengthen their creativity, and self-express.

Site of Study

This inquiry took place in the art studio at Pine Elementary School where I teach. Winding rural roads with horses, cows, and a wandering dog that I am happy to see still alive each day are what you would see driving to our school that suddenly appears at the end of this road. I have one window that is connected to a door that leads outside. My view consists of some green grass and the school's red, outer brick wall. There are a couple of metal green bars that had hopes for children to swing upon, but are usually abandoned. I have hopes for turning my little personal courtyard into a beautiful space that draws frequent visitors. I envision it will be an extension of the art studio where students and I can create art outside when it's a lovely day. I have not had the time to create this additional space, but I will find the time to make it happen soon. There are other areas of the school that have inviting outdoor spaces that we visit from time to time. For example, we have a sensory garden, a nature trail with an outdoor classroom, many garden beds, and a courtyard where a bunny, hens, garden beds, aquaponics, and an in-progress greenhouse reside. Not too far from there are goats bleating for your attention. A student population of over 1,000 students, including pre-kindergarten students, enjoys this environment. We serve students that range from low-socio economic statuses to

high-socio economic statuses. The school was a title 1 school a couple of years ago, but no longer is. As of last year, a new principal started at our school and hired many teachers, and I was one of them, the art teacher. The music teacher and I were the first full-time music and art teacher this school has had in a number of years. It has been and still is a great opportunity to build the fine arts program at our school, as well as it is a tremendous amount of pressure. We want to ensure it is respected as an integral part of students' learning and that it is imperative that we teach the whole student.

Our school is on track to become STEAM certified. This is a culture shift for our school. Some teachers have been making these connections for a long time. For some this is a natural shift, but there are teachers who resist the change and believe it's "one more thing" they are being asked to do. STEAM board members visit the school quarterly to assess our progress towards STEAM certification. When STEAM board member visit the school quarterly to assess our progress towards STEAM certification, some teachers feel as though we are putting on a dog and pony show to gain approval of our efforts, resulting in inauthentic learning experiences for our students. This is when teachers create on the fly "design challenges" that usually consist of marshmallows and straws to build a structure in less than an hour. However, one might question what are students actually learning by doing this? I bring up STEAM because it is apart of our daily conversation at my school. We aim to provide hands-on, authentic learning experiences using the design thinking process. The design thinking process is a component of our school focus wherein students learn to make connections between this process and their learning. Every teacher at our school has been given a design thinking process poster to hang in their rooms. The posters we first chose had verbiage like "ideate" and "empathize," which was recently modified to a more "kid friendly" version. There are key aspects of the design thinking process and the

creative process that relate in their intent to develop mindsets of innovation and creativity. Both processes help students define, articulate, and understand which stage they are at so that they can progress through the process. The artistic behaviors students practice through the creative process in the art studio help them build Studio Habits of Mind (Hogan et al., 2018), which strengthen creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that will manifest in all areas of their life.

Students have all been given a STEAM journal as part of the STEAM certification process. The idea and function of the journals is for students to always carry their journal with them throughout the day and to every class so that students use them in a personal way that speaks to their individual learning. However, some teachers have students use them in the way teachers want them to use them, e.g., copy notes and write this exact information, draw a specific picture, do not diverge from the teacher's exact instructions. Unfortunately, these tasks do not reflect students' own authentic learning. It is simple to follow someone else's instructions, step-by-step, as well as it is boring. It's no wonder students feel disengaged when they are asked to participate in a monkey see, monkey do act. Can it be that simple to demystify why or why not students appear to be engaged in their own learning? When teachers act as mentors to students' learning rather than spoon-feeding information, which Freire (2000) describes as the "“banking” concept of education" (p.72), it drastically changes the dynamics of the classroom. Students begin to think for themselves, take ownership of their learning, feel challenged, practice and improve problem solving and critical thinking skills, and strengthen their capacity to think creatively.

Students express their individuality through their artistic decisions daily in our art studio. Given the number of students I see, students' artwork gives me insight into who they are, what

they are interested in, what they are learning, what is important to them. The choices they make in their artwork helps me get to know them on a personal level. In our space, students have ownership over their learning, express their thoughts and feelings, put forth and see through their ideas, amplify their voice, exchange stories, and connect with others. Students take charge of their learning and find a path of exploration that is well suited to each individual, naturally lending itself to differentiation.

Participants

Participants for this inquiry included Hal, Harry, Ernest, Nadine, Eve, June, and Jo. Harry and Ernest are eight-year-old twin brothers in the same second-grade class. Hal and Nadine are nine-year-old students in the same third-grade class. Eve, June, and Jo are in fourth-grade and they are ten-years-old. These 7 students attend Pine Elementary School with approximately 950 other students. The sample selection criteria for the participants were as follows: (1) elementary school student, age seven to ten years old because I preferred to interview students who could articulate their experiences as well as remember the learning environment they were in last year (2) students who could meet afterschool to interview in a quiet room with less distractions (3) students who stood out as individuals who thrive given the freedom to create what they want (4) students who showed an interest in sharing their thoughts (5) students who had suggestions for change, which were noted and some changes were made.

Hal. Hal is soft-spoken and a sweet person, so I am always excited to see what he creates to give me insight into his personality. I enjoy learning about his ideas and interests through his artwork. He recently visited Taiwan to visit family because his mother was born there, and so he created a painting based on what he remembers while there. His painting depicts rice terraces. He also often draws comics, which he told me he sells for one dollar in his neighborhood. His

“Super Bunny” comic is displayed in the art studio to inspire others to write and illustrate comics. I love when students want to exhibit their artwork not only in the hallway, but also in the art studio because it becomes inspiration to other students who are searching for ideas. Sometimes we hang student art in the studio center relevant to the medium they used to create it, and then it acts as a springboard for other students to generate ideas. “Super Bunny” is located at the drawing center.



Figure 1. Hal’s watercolor painting depicting
rice terraces in Taiwan

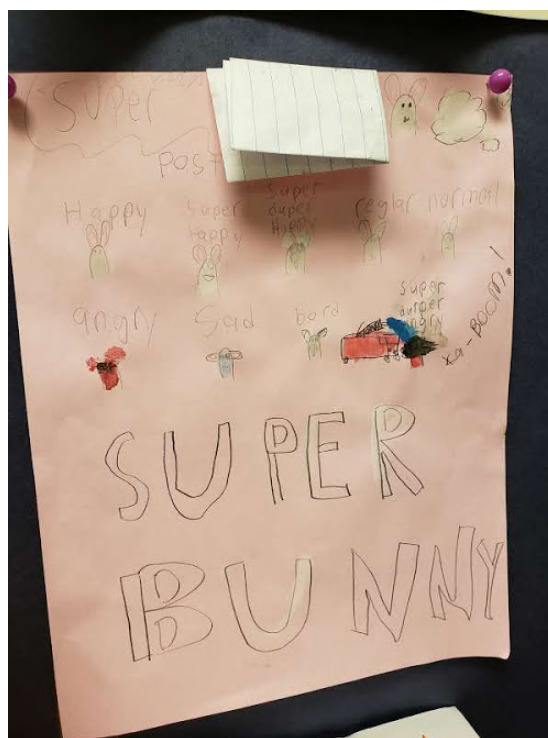


Figure 2. Hal’s “Supper Bunny” comic

Harry. I never find Harry idle, he is always thinking about his next steps, he just moves forward and brings any creation he has on his mind to life as he thinks it. He works and lives in the 3D realm. He loves dinosaurs and sculpts a variety of species every class and after school out of whatever he can get his hands on, e.g., paper, modeling clay, or wax from a cheese snack. He is very resourceful. His mom teaches Spanish as a special to Kindergarten at our school and

it also a paraprofessional, so he sometimes wanders into my class after school to mold a new creation or to show me a recent creation(s). He does not need images to reference as he can sculpt dinosaurs to accurate likeness from memory and imagination because he has closely studied them. I find someone like Harry really thrives in a choice-based environment because he has so many of his own interests and ideas he wants to pursue that if I tried direct instruction with a student like him, I would stand in the way of his creativity. Harry's latest creations are molded from the red wax that coats the *Babybel* cheese snack. Each time he eats a cheese, he creates something new. So far, from the cheese wax, I have seen an eagle that resides in the art studio now and an eagle perched on a tree from a picture his mom showed me. When I saw Harry most recently in the hallway, he asked me if I remembered his wax sculptures, to which I replied, "of course I do," and he said he has been creating a lot more of those. Another Harry original are paper sculptures of animals. He has created a range of animals, large and small, that could live together in a jungle. He said he plans to create the setting for them, but for now they reside in a shoebox. One afternoon Harry came to my room to show me his paper sculpted animals. He set his shoebox on the table closest to the table I have made my desk. He carried the delicate animals one by one over to my desk until a whole section of my desk was populated with all types of species, including a dragon because he most recently saw and was inspired by *How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World*. After admiration of his art and multiple pictures, we began to store them away in the shoebox. One by one he carried the animals back. As I observed his method for storing his animals so that I could properly help, I noticed he was arranging his animals from small to large. He confirmed that is how he likes to organize them. We carefully did this until all that was left was a large giraffe, which Harry intentionally placed its next and head over the side of the shoebox, and then closed it with the lid.



Figure 3. Harry's artist statement is written in the fire of the dragon's mouth





Figure 4. Some of the many sculptures Harry has sculpted out of modeling clay this year

Ernest. Ernest and Harry are twins, are in the same second grade class, and are both very imaginative. Ernest and Harry have an older brother in fourth grade that also displays these characteristics, yet despite their creative nature, I get a kick out of their mom dressing them in matching clothes everyday. They are all talented and resourceful like their mother. I say this because I have seen their mom's art created from recycled materials and she has helped and is currently helping us paint the setting for our school's musical. Unlike Harry, who frequently shows me his artwork, Ernest is constantly drawing and hardly takes any breaks from his work. He doesn't treat the art studio as the only space he can spend time creating. He takes his artwork with him everywhere and works on it any chance he gets, which has resulted in wrinkled paper that he has clutched under his arm as he walks into the art studio. He is inclusive of his friends who want to collaborate on the same paper and considers it a collaborative effort even if the contribution from a friend is an idea. Many times they have talked about working on their artwork at recess. They choose art as their recess. Wonderful. Ernest and Harry also have an older brother in fourth grade who is similar in the sense that he also collaborates with friends and is currently collaborating on a work of art. Ernest and I continue to build trust outside of class by

simply allowing him to borrow markers to use during recess and return them at the end of the day.



Figure 5. One of Ernest's dinosaur and habitat collaborative drawings

Nadine. Nadine is a passionate learner and explorer. I can tell she values time with others, enjoys working with friends, and is an overall social person. When I asked Nadine about a time when she felt excited about something she created, she said it was when she and a friend collaborated on a work of art titled *What Time Is It?* She liked when her peers would playfully ask what time it was in reference to their painting. She told me she likes painting with friends

most about our art class because they bounce ideas around and inspire one another. Nadine said she enjoys having the choice to create what she wants “instead of having the one thing” (Nadine, personal communication, December 4, 2018) that I presented for students to create.



Figure 6. Nadine’s drum she created from recycled items, which she plays with repurposed broken paintbrushes, and doubles as a maraca shaker with beans inside the drum

Eve. Eve is 10 years old, a fourth-grade student, and the daughter of the music teacher. The music teacher has been such a mentor to me even though our fields differ. She taught me early on that building our sense of community within our specials’ team is so important as these teachers spend most of their time in silos. Eve takes after her mom in that she is a leader. In the afternoon, after school, Eve will pop into the art studio with a couple other friends to see if I need help with anything. I usually let them stay and give them tasks to complete; although, there are plenty of times when June and Jo, who I will describe further later, will goof off and mainly want to talk with me while I try to accomplish something after the four back-to-back classes I just had. I mostly allow conversation to flow because I love getting to know them, and it’s not often I see and talk to students every day. Eve will usually pipe up and remind the other girls

they are there to help. During our interview, Eve had many thoughts and suggestions for our art studio. She understood the purpose of students rotating to different studio centers each time they came to gain exposure, but voiced her desire to choose from any studio center to work at to create her art. It was my intent to no longer have students rotate to different centers, but to allow them to choose a studio center when they came to art once they were familiar with the procedures of each studio center. Eve saying this prompted me to make this change soon after to allow students to choose not only what they create, but also how they create it. Eve's art has been mostly collaborative work with her friends. She values time spent with friends over independent exploration.

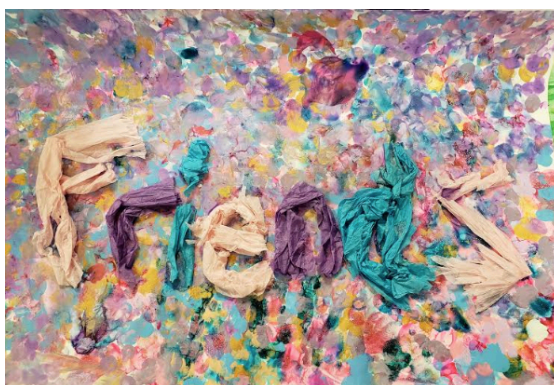


Figure 7. Eve's collaborative, mixed media art created with painted thumbprints and tissue paper

June. June is 10 years old and in fourth grade. She is often the instigator of a group of friends (Jo, Eve, June, and a couple other friends) and enjoys being the center of attention. June usually asks if they can have a note to come help in my classroom after school, which is an additional time for them to socialize. These girls are forming friendships that could potentially last a lifetime. It reminds me of some of my friendships that remain to this day that formed in elementary school. June has often asked me if there are art competitions that she and her friends can enter their collaborative artwork. These students love work as a group and celebrate their successes as a team. June brought in materials from home to work with one class. She brought

foam and during that particular class time a new studio center was born. Multiple students asked June if they could use some of the foam to create a “squishy pillow,” as June coined. It is like a stress ball, except rectangular in shape. They cut pieces of foam to stuff into a paper pillow they created and designed. June was acting as an entrepreneur, describing her art as a product that could be sold. Her designs included emojis or a pattern of colors, but explained that other interests could be designed onto squishy pillows, such as characters from Fortnite, the trending game. June, Jo, and Eve all discussed the idea of an experimentation station/center and/or invention center to play with ideas, tinker, and invent. A great idea for a studio center that I will think through further and introduce in the near future.



Figure 8. June’s large painting exploring color combinations

Jo. Jo is a bright and passionate 10-year-old. She is usually calm, but experiences emotions at an intense state whether it’s happiness, frustration, or anger. She wears her emotions of her sleeves, so it is always apparent to those around her what she is feeling, but not always why. For example, times when I tell Eve, June, and Jo that I do not need help on any given day, Jo always expresses her frustration with my decision. I do not react to her frustration because she needs to learn to respect other people’s decisions. Even though I do not want her to get upset, I do not need to explain myself. Jo’s responses to my questions during our interview were well articulated and helped me to better understand how having choice has affected her work in

art. Jo is always focused and engaged in her art when she is in class. She enjoys working both collaboratively and independently, but mostly prefers to see through her own ideas. When asked if Jo preferred a teacher-directed class like she experienced last year or a student-centered, choice-based art classroom this year, she said she prefers it the way it is right now. Jo said, “it’s like we kind of get to make up our own techniques...almost” (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019), and they most certainly do. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1964) support what Jo said and explain that “a technique is an individual’s use of materials as a means of expression” (p. 34). It is interesting that Jo said “almost” because at this time students had not yet been released to choose any studio center to work in when they come. This limitation at the time may have impacted her saying almost, but not completely. Jo, also, helped me think through improvements to the art studio/my methodology to benefit her and other students was when she said “I kind of don’t like that we only get to see one technique each time we come. I want to see a little bit more” (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019). She is referring to the five-minute demonstrations I give at the beginning of class. She wants to see more of them, which brought me to the realization during our interview that I need more visual resource charts/menus around the room in each studio center to help self-direct students when they are in any given center. If I added more to the mini demonstrations at the beginning of class, they would defeat the purpose of being short and it would result in less time for students to work in studio centers. I will be making many more visual resource anchor charts this summer and talking with Jo reaffirmed and reminded me of my adding more.

creations? Lastly, I analyzed students' artist statements, which are self-assessments, wherein they reflect over their artistic process and self-assess their artwork. Their artist statements help me assess their artistic thinking and help inform my future instruction.

Field notes. I have recorded field notes of the ongoing transition to choice-based art education. I formatively assessed students' choices and progress through observation of both their artwork and artistic behaviors (Teaching for Artistic Behavior, 2019). I provided feedback at appropriate times that pushed their ideas and skillset further as they created in their studio. I paid attention to their choice of art materials (during class or through photographs of their artwork) and techniques used in their artwork to infer how students practiced learner autonomy, strengthened creativity, and self-expressed as well as inform the needs for future technique demonstrations to guide students toward mastery.

Interviews. Students are active members of a choice-based art education classroom; therefore, the rationale for conducting interviews and analyzing transcriptions was to better understand their perceptions about making their own choices about what they create and to learn how that affects their decision-making process and impacts their learning experiences in the art studio. Interviews took place in the art studio either during class or after school. I transcribed each interview soon after it took place, analyzed data by noting themes that emerged, and wrote about my findings to complete this study. I kept this question in mind: Do students feel a greater sense of agency because the subject matter of their artwork is entirely up to them? Hearing students' responses to questions I asked along with additional comments or suggestions they wanted to make informs how I design the art studio setting for them. It is for them, so this project has been beneficial for me to better understand what students think, feel, and want to see change in the art studio.

CHAPTER 4

Implementation

Everyday, students arrive in a line at the art studio door. I welcome them into our studio space where they file in around a demonstration table. There we talk about art expectations, clean up procedures, volume level expectations, and any new procedural information I need to share through a five-minute demonstration. I see each class once every six days for 50 minutes, so it is crucial that the mini demonstrations are brief so that students have time to work on their artwork. My favorite time of each class, and students', is sandwiched between the first 5 minutes and last 10 minutes of class while students are creating. This is when choice is in full effect, the creative process underway, and students practice their artistic behaviors in studio centers. Studio centers are as large as a countertop or a bookshelf with two tables or as small as a shoebox that can be tucked away in a corner of the room. The studio centers we currently have open are drawing, painting, printmaking, clay modeling, stop motion animation, collage, weaving, and a box with items for building three-dimensional objects.



Figure 10. Demonstration table



Figure 11. Some of the studio centers

A large aspect of what makes choice-based art education an efficient and successful environment for students is that the classroom is organized into studio centers with relevant materials and visual anchors to further guide students to be self-directed and self-sufficient. I try to label everything so that students can efficiently return art materials to their proper place, so that all students can easily access what they need. The last 10 minutes of class are allotted to cleaning, taking care of our art materials, and the overall maintenance of the art studio. I remind students that artistic behaviors not only take place while creating their artwork, but also in taking care of the art materials and art studio. I also remind students that having choice comes with responsibilities, and they need to prove they can handle all that choice. My teaching philosophy has been inspired and informed by the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) organization, which practices a choice-based art education methodology. Our studio environment allows me to observe how students function in a space that promotes freedom to create, self-express, connect, explore, and discover. I am interested in how a series of their own decisions leads them through authentic learning experiences.

How does choice in a choice-based art education classroom empower students to build agency, strengthen their creativity, and self-express? A couple weeks after the new school year began, I was able to compare artwork that was created in a teacher-directed art classroom last year to a student-centered art classroom this year. I quickly noticed changes in students' behavior and the level of care and attention they gave their art. I have been observing and making notes since I have started with choice-based art education at the start of the school year. About two weeks into the new school year, I shared my early findings with my principal about the noticeable changes in student engagement. Not long after that, art teachers in the district gathered for our professional learning community, and I shared with some of them that I was transitioning to choice-based art education and teaching for artistic behaviors and the response was that of intrigue. All of these teachers practiced teacher-directed instruction at the time. A couple of the teachers I shared this with had never heard of the methodology and another teacher had researched the Teaching for Artistic Behavior organization and long wanted to try it in her classroom, but just had not yet taken the first step. Two of these teachers wanted to come to my classroom to gain an idea of how studio centers can be organized and observe my students working in this type of environment. Every choice-based art classroom is set up differently based on what works best for the students and what materials and resources a teacher and students have to use.

I shared resources with another art teacher who found the approach intriguing and asked many questions about my students' experience and my own experience in making the transition to choice-based art education. I shared a video of how I organized my room into studio centers, which is what I showed to students in the beginning of the year, lesson plans, and my pedagogy. She has been trying it out with some grade levels and has reported back with positive

experiences to share and said her administration liked what they saw. I recently reached out to this teacher and proposed we meet on a regular basis to discuss what areas are working well and what areas need improvement. While all TAB art educators and art classrooms are different, we act as islands enough as it is being the only art teachers at our school and our field of expertise is often misunderstood. We need to band together as an archipelago to develop a general framework that will make what is happening in our classrooms more visible and guide our initiatives towards excellence.

Some of the other art teachers in my district asked how my administration viewed the transition and how they responded to the quality of artwork that was being created. A lot of these comments and questions were concerned with a product-based mindset, i.e., they wondered what an administration and others would think about a variety of student artwork or processes that do not result in an exact product that has been laid out by the art teacher for students to replicate. The creative, artistic process, wherein the child is respected as an artist and behaves as an artist should be of higher significance than a beautifully replicated product.

Student Artwork

Below are photographs of students' artwork that speaks to their creative process (originality, fluency, and flexibility (Runco & Acar, 2010; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1964)). The opportunity for students to have full choice in subject matter and art media are what set the foundation for authentic self-expression through artmaking. I include a variety of photographs of students' artwork from grade levels kindergarten to fifth grade that encompass a breadth of creations based on student choice in the art studio:



Figure 12. A second grader's fashion design *Figure 13. A fifth grader exclaims that girls can do anything*



Figure 14. Sculptural play with existing figurines *Figure 15. A fifth grader's love for dinosaurs*



Figure 16. A fourth grader's depiction of a beach



Figure 17. A fourth grader's cat character

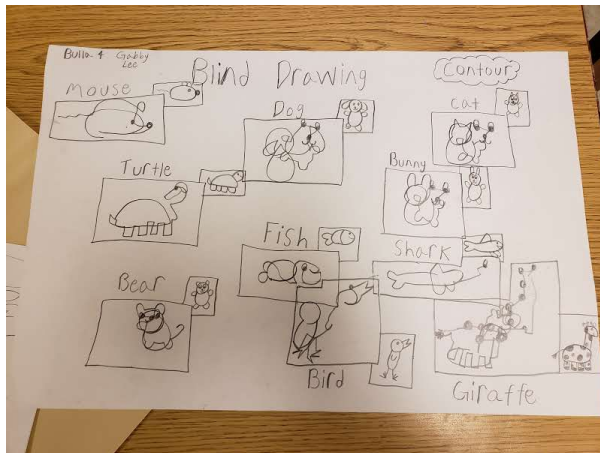


Figure 18. A fourth grader's blind contour animals



Figure 19. Fourth graders' collage satire of the latest fashion trends



Figure 20. A fourth grader's Earth relief



Figure 21. A third grader's recycled materials boat

that floats!



Figure 22. A fourth grader's observational drawing



*Figure 23. A fourth grader collaged him
and myself*



Figure 24. Share your zines



Figure 25. A kindergartener's tree house



Figure 26. A kindergartener explores color

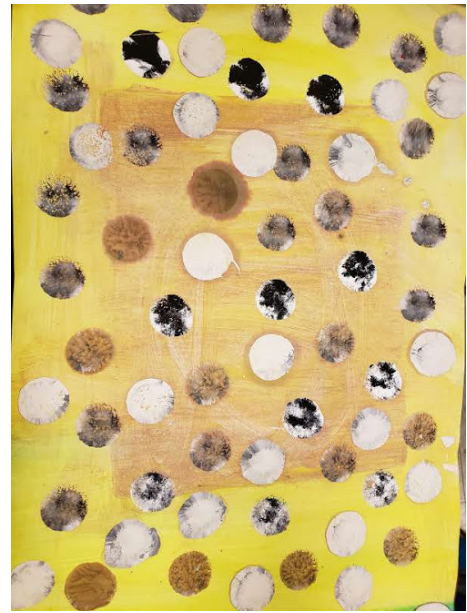


Figure 27. A fifth grader explores the use of
sponges



Figure 28. A fourth grader's landscape scene



Figure 29. A second grader's observational still life drawing

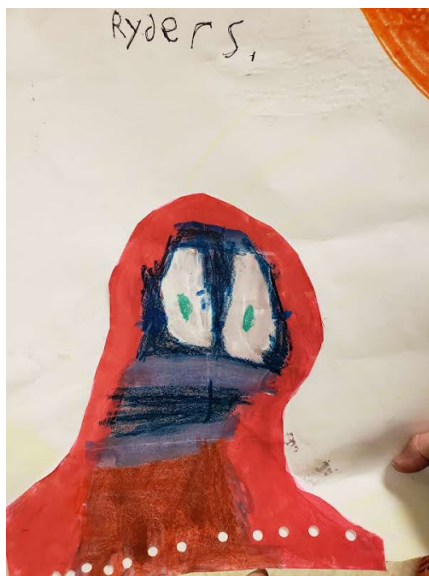


Figure 30. A second grader's new character



Figure 31. Two fourth graders' collaboration of the apocalypse

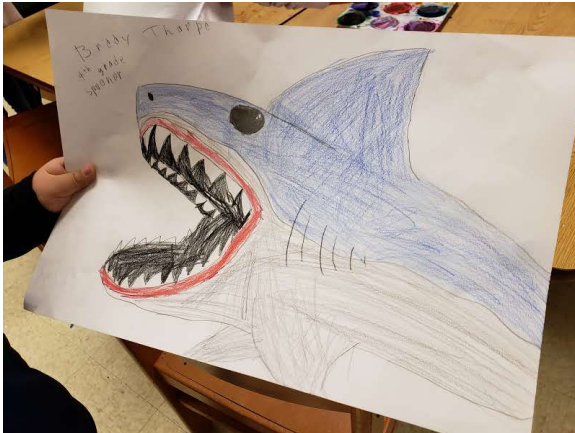


Figure 32. A fourth grader's shark



Figure 33. A fourth grader's space exploration

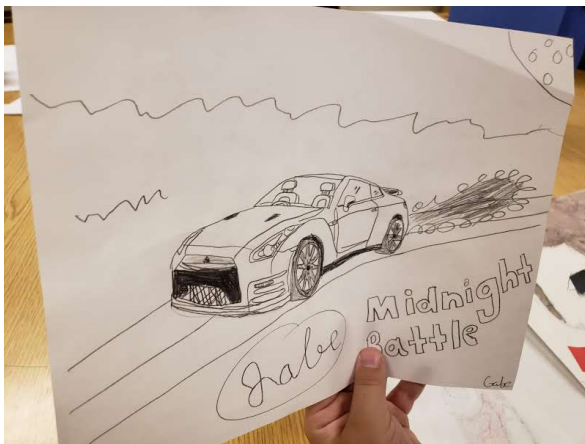


Figure 34. A fourth grader's passion for cars



Figure 35. And more cars



Figure 36. A kindergartener's observational still life drawing

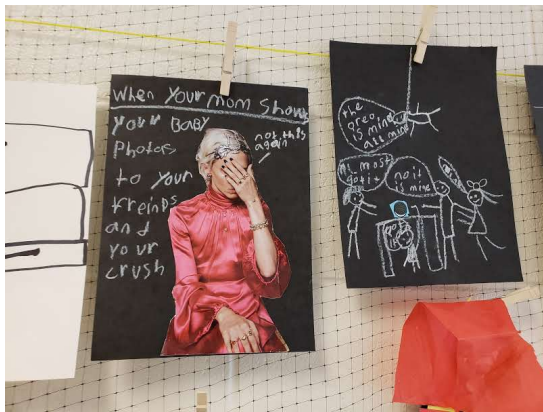


Figure 37. A first grader's representation of the Mona Lisa from his own point of view



Figure 38. A fourth grader creates memes using collage and drawing

Figure 39. Practice weaving



Figure 40. A second grader depicted her great grandmother's pot, from which a plant grows as the 2nd grader continues to water/care for it

Figure 41. A fifth grader's landscape using oil pastel on wax paper



Figure 42. First graders playing with
stop-motion animation



Figure 43. A kindergartener's car on a collaged road.

Get off the road!

These works of art would not have come into existence if I had stood before the class and practiced a teacher-directed, project-based method of teaching because these are expressions of who they are, not who I am, and exercising their own ideas, not my ideas.

CHAPTER 5

Findings

In a choice-based art education classroom, how does choice empower students to build agency, strengthen their creativity, and self-express? This question has been at the forefront of my mind throughout this interpretive inquiry project and formed inquiries related to student agency, creativity, and self-expression. Choice-based art education has taught me how students' choices amplify students' voices and in turn create authentic and meaningful learning experiences. This is evident in the decisions students make in this environment and in listening to my students talk about their thoughts and feelings concerning choice and how having choice impacts their decision-making, creativity, and self-expression. I am an advocate for student choice and I want to ensure students have the opportunity to fully access their choices in the art studio. Interviews with students along with my research of the literature taught me that I was unintentionally limiting them.

Choice and Student Agency

New revelations arose after interviewing students and as I listened to and transcribed the interviews. It was always my intention to eventually allow students to choose any art material they wanted to create their artwork once they became comfortable with each studio center, yet they continued to rotate in groups to work in a different studio center each time they came. They were required to work within that studio center, one center rotation was called choice, and this is when they could choose whichever studio center to work in. They always had the option to choose the subject matter of their work, but it was not until I interviewed students and through daily informal conversations that I realized the need to give students the choice to use any materials they desired. I got stuck in what I thought was a less chaotic version of choice-based

art education, which is not a problem with strong structure and routines set in place. I was unintentionally holding students back from the art materials they loved to use and wanted to explore on a deeper level until I offered students full choice. While studio centers need to be introduced and opened slowly so that students can become familiar with setup and cleanup procedures, I waited too long to allow them the opportunity to choose any studio center. While exposure is important, it is not necessary to continue to make students practice different types of art making. Students are encouraged to explore many art materials to gain exposure to a variety of ways to create art, but again they are also exposed to a range of art materials through the demonstrations given at the beginning of class, through peer observation, or peer coaching if they are interested in learning more. The Teaching for Artistic Behavior organization sees students choosing the same medium each time as a non-issue as they liken it to a child who practices piano without being asked to play the clarinet or drums (Teaching for Artistic Behavior, 2019). This became evident as I got deeper in my research and began to understand the importance and rationale of allowing students to dive deep with the art materials they loved to use to create, so that they can become experts working in a specific medium. I once heard it put something like this, imagine an art studio full of artists that included a young O'Keefe, Matisse, and Rodin, and the teacher required them to use specific art materials that do not always allow them to self-express in the way that best suits their artistic needs and spirit. It stunts an artist's growth. Just like the students I interviewed above, I want to support all of my students' artistic growth. To do this, I must keep a pulse on how they are evolving as artists. Which medium is of interest to them? Is it one? Many? I look forward to experiencing how this approach to teaching and learning will develop over time. When I first told each class they are now familiar enough with each center and they can choose to work with any art materials to

create their artwork, they all got so excited, like I had been suppressing them. To my surprise, yet apparent in hindsight, it was not only the choice in subject matter that was of great value to students; it was of equal value to students that they had choice in how they created their artwork. For example, the data collected from both interviews with students and students' artwork supports this claim.

During interviews with students, they had many thoughts and opinions about the way in which the art studio was setup, my approach to teaching, and their approach to learning. Hearing students' feedback is the essential in the effectiveness of teachers' methodology and the authenticity of the learning happening in the classroom. In my interview with Eve, she said that "it's good that we have many different stations; although, I want to pick stations sometimes" (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019). At the time I interviewed Jo, we were still rotating to a different studio center each time they came to art and she was talking about developing her own techniques, "It's like we kind of get to make up our own techniques, almost" (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019). It became clear that when she used words like "kind of" and "almost" that she felt she did not fully get to develop her own techniques because she did not fully have choice in the materials she wanted to use. June also spoke to the need to first be able to have choice to allow herself to better self-express, "having choice makes me feel more comfortable because last time we were at the choice center and sometimes some kids when they are at collage they want to do paint or draw and it gets a little "oof" feeling. That's why choice center is better so that you don't just have to do these three" (June, personal communication, February 4, 2019). Eve, June, and Jo are saying they felt limited in their choices so they voiced their desires to be allowed to choose the studio center they love and go deeper with their art material(s) of choice to further develop their techniques while using those

materials. When we had rotations, there was a center called choice where you could choose any center in which to work. When I asked Jo what she liked most about our art class, she said, “I really like painting and the choice center because you get to choose which station you want to go to...Maybe we can have like only one choice center because then we could pick whatever we want!” (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019). Our art studio has become like she said, “one choice center.” Jo’s desire for full choice in the art studio was clearly stated, and changes were soon after made to full choice.

I was not a complete stickler for students staying in the studio center they were supposed to be in, as I would allow a student to work in a different center if they expressed the need. However, not all students expressed their feelings because perhaps they were too shy to say something or had learned to respect authority’s wishes without question. For instance, I can remember a time I look over at the collage center to see a group of fifth-grade girls with their artwork in front of them, but not doing anything until I came over and instructed them to use the collage materials to add to their art since that day, during that particular rotation, their group was stationed for the collage studio center. I distinctly remember some of their past artwork with collage, but they responded with frustration because they did not want to add collage in their particular artwork at the time. This is also when one of the girls at this group was painting at this center instead of collaging and asked me, “But isn’t art supposed to be fun?” I thought I was affording students a lot of choice, maybe compared to their homeroom classes or other teacher-directed art classes, but this showed me I was not affording students full choice, and that is something they expressed they wanted and needed. The belief that students needed to practice a variety of artmaking to improve their skills with each art material became a belief I held onto too tightly. Without even realizing it, I was becoming close-minded when all the while it was my

mission to be open-minded. While my perspective has shifted based on what I have learned in the literature and what I have noticed in the art studio, I still believe exposure to a variety of art media is important; however, exposure does not only happen through direct experience, it also happens through observation, i.e., students are exposed to many art media through the mini demonstrations I give, seeing and learning from their peers working in studio centers other than the studio centers they love the most, and the fact that each studio center exists in their art studio space, which they can at any moment access and experience a new art material if they so choose. Exposure is less likely to occur in a teacher-directed, project-based classroom because students only experience the art material(s) presented by the teacher at the teacher's discretion. I knew this from the start of transitioning to choice-based art education, but allowing students to choose to work in any studio center was something I planned to ease into as they became familiar with each studio center and procedures for setup and cleanup. I lost sight of this in my fear that students would flock to the same studio center, that it would be painting, the messiest of all studio centers, and on the pricier side of consumable items. This is not what happened and continues not to be the case.

I hear the question or statement quite often in the education, "what is in students' best interest?" and I wonder how many educators ask their students this question and actually listen to students' responses and make changes based on students' opinions. For example, when students were still rotating to a different center each time they came to art. I noticed a student was painting at the collage center when she was supposed to be working with collage materials. I told her this time it was okay, but next time she needs to work with the materials at the center at which she is supposed to be. I told her it was important for them to practice a variety of art making. To which she asked, "but isn't art supposed to be fun?" Her comment made me feel a

great deal of frustration at the time, but now, in reflection, her comment is so telling of how students were being limited by me. I had put in so much time, effort, and energy in creating a choice-based art studio for them to create their artwork about anything they wanted; still she was neither satisfied nor appreciative. It was eye-opening, as my intentions were not to deprive them of choice, but the exact opposite. To her, painting was what was fun, interesting, and engaging. Who was I to tell her she could not choose to dive deeper with an art material that spoke to and satisfied her soul.

Creativity and Self-Expression

Each student has different ideas and interests, which creates a natural, harmonious balance of art making in the art studio. I have noticed fewer students ask me questions right at the start of class because they know exactly which studio center they want to work in. Like Harry, who needs to float between a couple of studio centers to create exactly what he has in mind, is allowed to ebb and flow in any studio center he needs to support his unique creative process. Or like the group of girls at the collage studio center wishing they were working at a different studio center because they had ideas they wanted to express that led them to use certain art materials that were not found at the collage center. It was not my desire to confine students to working in a studio center they did not feel passionately about. My desire for students was for them to generate their own ideas based on their own interests, create art that was meaningful to them, and all the while practice their artistic behaviors. I wanted students to practice working in each studio center and become familiar with the setup procedures, specific art materials, and cleanup procedure at each center, but it was not my intent to keep rotations going for as long as we did this year. I now realize from reading the literature that studio centers can be introduced and opened one at a time, so that students still have choice in what they use and create. Once

students are familiar with the initial studio centers open and exhibit appropriate artistic behaviors in those centers, additional studio centers can be introduced for further choice and exploration. The benefits of students choosing any art material they want is that they can spend more time with materials they enjoy, allowing them to dive deeper in what those materials can do, become experts at using the materials, and more intuitively and confidently use the materials to express their ideas. Through this creative process, students strengthen their creativity by developing key aspects of creativity, such as fluency, flexibility, and originality (Runco & Acar, 2010; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1964). Students consistently practice generating ideas (fluency), problem solving (flexibility), and expressing their own ideas in a manner that is unique to the individual (originality) (Runco & Acar, 2010; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1964).

Jo made a connection between choice and self-expression and made it clear that self-expression emerges from choice. When I asked Jo if she liked being able to choose what she wants in art, Jo responded, “Yes, I do because you get to express your personality and you get to keep it for yourself or you can hang it up and show everybody” (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019). Eve also commented on how choice allows her and other students to better self-express when given the option to choose which art materials they use. I asked Eve if she felt she could better express herself by being able to choose what she wants to create. Eve explained, “I feel like I am able to express myself this way because you can paint whatever you want that expresses how you feel at the time. It’s like I said over and over again, it’s good that we have many different stations; although, I want to pick stations sometimes. Like you actually get to express what is there, but I feel like some people don’t really express and they just do something and then they just throw it away and then they aren’t really thinking about their art” (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019). It was not apparent to me from listening back to

our interview alone that choice in studio center was important to Eve. It was when I began to transcribe the words into this document that this became evident. It's when she said, "it's good that we have many different stations, although, I want to pick stations sometimes" (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019) that I received her message loud and clear, and I made a change to afford students full choice. Eve took note of other students that connect better with some art materials than they do with others. She said some people express themselves best in studio centers they love, using art materials that speak to them, and help them to create the idea they have in mind. As for creativity, Jo, June, and Eve similarly described what creativity meant to them and how they feel creative in their choices in the art studio. Jo explained that, "creativity means that you get to like create, express, and you get to do whatever you want. It's like you don't have to do this one thing" (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019). June also said, "creativity is to create and express your feelings" and she also explained she most enjoys that she can create her "own designs and not have to copy off" (June, personal communication, February 4, 2019). Eve similarly stated, "I think creativity is doing what you want and you can do many different things" (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019), and then Eve went on to talk about a variety of ideas she had for creating artwork in the art studio, which demonstrated creativity as it relates to fluency (Runco & Acar, 2010; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1964). She gave an additional example of creativity as being resourceful with what you already have,

as an example, my brother because he is creative because he uses the Legos he has in the Lego box and he makes something out of that. Like he has made a robot, he's made a flying ship, and I made houses. (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019)

When I asked students to describe how their creativity has improved this year, Eve said,

I think my creativity has improved because I have actually seen the different techniques that you do, and I put it into perspective and put it with my artwork that makes it better, and I think it's more improved because it's not just the technique that you do, but it's all the different things that I thought of when I was younger. Like when I was in second grade, I did a little bit of a different technique where I had two pieces of paper cut out and then I kind of weaved them. You did something similar, but I added something different because of something new here that we had. All the art teachers are not the same, so you could have different techniques and put them together and improve your artwork or make it better. (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019)

Here, Eve explains how techniques are developed by the individual artist and shaped by personal touch and experience with the material. June's response noted that her creativity has improved this year based on the methodology change in our art studio. She explained,

Well, last year, I remember you teaching our class how to just do this one thing, and, I mean I still liked art class, but it wasn't my favorite anymore because we just had to do what you did, and I like to create my own things. (June, personal communication, February 4, 2019)

When asked if students felt they could adequately express themselves if I told them what to create and how to create it, Jo explained, "No, not really because we don't really get to express ourselves. It's like us just doing what someone tells us to do. It's not us doing like whatever you want" (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019) and Eve responded,

I feel like if I couldn't do what I wanted that time at that station with those things and not get to do it next time or on another artwork, I would feel upset and almost like dejected

and crestfallen because I wouldn't be able to do what I want at that station. (Eve, personal communication, February 4, 2019)

Another example of how creativity takes shape through choice is seen in Harry's artwork. Below are photos of his work that indicates the importance of choice in art material, which I will explain my analysis following the photos:



Figure 44. Harry's inventive animal paper sculptures

Harry's art is an example of how having choice in art material and subject matter was crucial to him being autonomous, which built the foundation for creativity and self-expression to emerge. Yes, Harry's choice of topic is satisfied, but his choice in how his work culminates would have

been restricted if not allowed to use the materials of his choice at any given time. If I continued to limit students' choices by requiring them to stay at the studio center they were supposed to be at in a specific rotation, then Harry's ideas would have been stunted. Let's say his group was supposed to be working at the drawing center during a specific rotation. Harry would have only been allowed to draw his animals, but not cut them out. Perhaps he likes to work on one animal paper sculpture at a time where he first draws one, colors, cuts out, folds, and then moves onto the second animal wherein he goes through this same process. I would have, sadly, and probably have at some point, interfered with Harry's unique creative process. Continue on with this example, the next time Harry visits the art studio, he is required to work in the painting center because this is the next studio center in rotation. Harry does not want to paint his animals; his vision is to color them with colored pencils because he loves the intricacies of mark making with colored pencils.

One obvious reason why all of my students' artwork shows creativity and self-expression is because it evolves from their own interests, and their own processes. During my interview with Jo, she talked about her current work of art of leaves as an example of a time when she felt she could express herself through art because she "really likes to have a little bit of nature around" (Jo, personal communication, February 4, 2019). June explained a time she felt creative and inventive in art when she made "squishy pillows." She invented a new studio center that many students wanted to explore that day. Creativity and self-expression are not forms you can teach; however, artistic behaviors and art demonstrations are foundational tools that can be modeled to help guide students through their unique creative process.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In conclusion, finding the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) organization and transitioning to a choice-based art classroom has been the best thing I have done in my short, almost two years of teaching for my students and myself. I know my students feel this way because I ask and they tell me their opinions. Each day students practice artistic behaviors and improve at this approach to learning. They navigate studio centers, practice generating meaningful ideas, strengthen their creativity, become more self-driven and directed, and understand the importance of organization, cleaning, taking care of their art materials, and their art studio. Allowing students the freedom to make choices in what they create and how they create it becomes the pulse of the art studio, which in turn allows me to keep a pulse on the desires and needs of my students. I am evolving as an art specialist as I day-to-day reflect on the areas where the art studio needs improvement to better meet the needs of my students so that they can pursue their ideas and grow as artists in an art studio. As Douglas (Gaw & Fralick, 2018) stated in an interview on Block Paper Scissors, to be a TAB teacher, “you have to be curious, flexible, a student of your own teaching, and a harsh critic of yourself.” It is my hope that students voice their opinions in every facet of their lives. People will not always listen or make changes based on what they have to say, but it is imperative that they keep trying because they will in one way or another make a difference with their voice.

Recommendations for Further Research

It would be of value to continue research by recording how a choice-based art education classroom evolves and how students’ artistic behaviors develop over time. It would be beneficial to track a sample selection of kindergarteners as they progress through each grade level to fifth

grade and document and analyze how they develop artistic behaviors over time and progress as artists. Furthermore, it would be interesting to follow this sample group into middle school and high school to determine their preparedness, if they choose art as an elective, for working in studio centers with inquiries to explore that transfer from their experience working in an art studio at their elementary school. Did choice in studio centers and practice generating and seeing through ideas with focus on process rather than product in elementary school better prepare students for studio work in middle and high school to further their skill set in a medium of choice and help deepen their inquiry?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. Do you like being able to choose what to create in art?
2. Do you feel you are able to better express yourself this way?
3. Do you think you could express yourself if I told you what to create and what to use to create it?
4. If you were here last year, do you prefer our art class this way or the way it was last year?
5. Do you feel anything should change about our art class or is anything missing?
6. What do you like most about our art class?
7. Least?

Appendix B. Timeline of Study

July 30 th	Began collecting data the first day of the new school year as I transitioned to a choice-based art education methodology based on the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) philosophy.
August 22 nd	Proposal approved.
November 25 th	Feedback from committee members given shift in research.
December 3 rd – December 15 th	Reworked research question and drafted interview questions that align.
December 4 th	Interviews during a third grade class with Nadine and Hal.

December 4 th	Interviews during a second grade class with Harry.
December 5 th	Interview with Ernest, second grade, after school. Fourth grade students help tidy up after school, so they also chimed in on the questions I was asking Ernest.
December 15 th	Began the format of my paper and transcription of interviews.
Teacher Holiday December 20 th – January 31 st	Wrote multiple components of my report and began further research for the rework of my literature review.
January 25 th	Graduation paperwork deadline.
February 1 st	Share copy of report draft with Dr. Bustle.
February 4 th	Additional interviews with three fourth grade students, June, Jo, and Eve, who help in the art studio after school.
February 4 th – February 5 th	Finish transcribing interviews with Hal and Harry. Transcribe interviews with fourth graders, June, Jo, and Eve.
February 13 th	Begin revising sections of paper.
February 23rd	Literature review section sent to Dr. Bustle.
March 3rd	Revised literature review sent to Dr. Bustle.

March 10 th	First three sections of paper sent to Dr. Bustle. Doodle poll sent to committee members. All members available April 15 th from 4:30 pm-6:30 pm.
March 17 th	Last three sections of paper sent to Dr. Bustle.
March 20 th	Final draft of applied project report including all revised sections of paper to Dr. Bustle for review.
March 25 th	Final draft of paper to Dr. Bustle for approval after any further revisions.
April 1 st	Send final applied project report to committee members to read two weeks before final defense.
April 15 th 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm	Final defense with committee.
April 15 th -April 18 th	Have final paper PDF signed by major professor to be turned in to Stephanie Sutton's office on April 22 nd by noon.
April 22 nd	MAEd applied project defense exam paperwork and .pdf file signed by Dr. Bustle due to Stephanie Sutton's office by noon.
May 10 th	Graduation day!

Appendix C. Fully Transcribed Interviews**Interview with Hal.**

Lisa: Tell me about this again. It's from Taiwan, right?

Hal: Yes, that's a road in Taiwan.

Lisa: It's beautiful. The way you painted it and with watercolors. It's a great medium for this. Lovely. Are you going to add anything else to it?

Hal: Maybe. It meant to be a grass and a sunset, and then I didn't really want to do that anymore.

Lisa: I like that it's like zoomed in version of that and it appears as though it is extending off the composition. It leaves things up to the imagination as well. How do you feel about centers?

Hal: I love them.

Lisa: Do you like them better than last year?

Hal: Yes.

Lisa: Why is that?

Hal: Because you get to do different centers instead of like the same thing.

Lisa: Yeah, would you like anything to change about our art class?

Hal: Maybe more centers. Just one more.

Lisa: Just one more? What kind of materials would you like to see?

Hal: A place for like giant paper.

Lisa: Would this be for an individual to do by themselves or would this be collaborative?

Hal: One person could draw on one side and another could draw on another side.

Lisa: I love that. That's a great idea. We can totally do that. Like with some butcher paper. How do you feel about getting to choose what you want to create?

Hal: I like it. Because a lot of people haven't been to Taiwan, so I like sharing this with people.

Lisa: That's awesome. Thank you for your time, Hal.

Hal: You're welcome.

Interview with Harry.

Lisa: How do you feel about having choice to draw whatever you want?

Harry: Um, pretty good and happy.

Lisa: Okay. Why?

Harry: Because I can pick what I am going to make and show others how good I am at art.

Lisa: Do you prefer choosing to make what you want or to be guided to make something by someone else? I know you went to a different school last year, so you can think about your experience there as well.

Harry: I want to be free to make anything.

Lisa: Why do you think that is?

Harry: Because I can pick what I want to make and be happy about it and not doing what others want me to do.

Lisa: Yeah. So do you like centers?

Harry: Yeah.

Lisa: Is there anything that you want to change about it?

Harry: No.

Lisa: Okay. And don't feel like you can't tell me something that you want to change just because I'm the art teacher. If you want something to change, totally tell me because I want to get better for you guys. So is there anything you can think of that you want to be different?

Harry: No.

Lisa: Really? Okay. Cool. You're completely happy with how it is in here?

Harry: Yes.

Lisa: Okay, cool. Well, you'll let me know if anything changes, right?

Harry: Mhm!

Lisa: What do you think about...people have mentioned like being given the choice to work with any art material or at any studio center when they come in. Do you think that would be better?

Harry: Yes, because we can be free and pick what we want to do.

Lisa: And that's important to you?

Harry: Mhm. And we can pick if we want to draw or model clay or paint...

Lisa: Instead of waiting to get to the center you want.

Harry: Yeah.

Lisa: Well thank you for taking time to tell me how you feel about our class, Harry.

Interview with Ernest.

Lisa: How do you feel about being able to choose whatever you want to draw or create or build or whatever and here.

Ernest: Awesome.

Lisa: Yeah. Why's that? You could compare it to your other classes that you've had, you know. I didn't have you last year but, but you can compare it to that.

Ernest: I like this year mostly.

Lisa: Yeah? So what did you do at your last school? Did you get to draw whatever you wanted?

Ernest: No, we had to do what the art teacher said we had to do.

Lisa: How did that make you feel?

Ernest: It kind of made me feel like, like bored.

Lisa: Mmm. It wasn't your idea. Okay, so you like to choose. Now, is there anything that you would want to change about how we have it set up in here?

Ernest: No.

Lisa: No? What about....someone has said... (laughs) she (student in the background) is mouthing slime station. So someone had mentioned they would like to be able to go to any center each time that they come. How would you feel about that?

Ernest: Um, bored because sometimes when we're not using the clay, I just want to go to...I want to figure...I want to have a random center.

Lisa: Okay. All right. So, can you say more about that? So with the clay, are you saying that you do like working with clay or that you rather not?

Ernest: I would like to do the clay except I would also like to have a random center.

Lisa: Okay. So like when you're at choice center and you get to choose whichever center you go to. Right? You like that. But what if you were able to come in here and choose any art materials to use? (one of the students who comes in afterschool to help tidy up shouts that it would be a lot better and comes into the conversation offering up suggestions.) Say that I didn't tell you where to go, you know, and if you needed to paint, you could go and paint, but what if the painting center was full? Then you would just choose something else. Right? And maybe check off the center you worked at?

Eve: But maybe...not just saying because we're older grades that are more mature and that can handle it more. Maybe we could have like third, fourth and fifth graders or something. You have every single person in that grade or like since you have one class at a time, every single person in that class have like little magnets that have their names on it and every time they are at a center you would check it off. And if they've been there more than four times and they had to choose a different one so that someone else can go there.

Lisa: Tell me more about the magnets.

Eve: You would put a magnet there and then every time you would have a little name chart and check it off, but that would take a lot of work.

Lisa: I like that idea.

June: But I'm just kind of wondering. Why does this have to be paints here and the drawing center here...

Eve: Because of all the supplies.

Lisa: Yeah, proximity wise. Like all the drawing stuff is here.

June: I know, but like it would be easier if we just pick a spot to work at...

Lisa: Yeah, and just know that those supplies exist in that spot. Right?

June: Mhm.

Lisa: Alright. Sorry Ernest. So how do you feel about centers?

Ernest: I feel fine...I feel good about the centers.

Lisa: Why do you feel good about the centers?

Ernest: Because...because they're like more...like you can roam...you can be free. You don't have to...you don't have to do what the art teacher...like every single person has to do what the art teacher says. There's different stuff to do.

Lisa: Awesome. So do you feel like you're able to see more of your ideas through because...because you can come in here and just self-express whatever you want to. Do you think you're getting better at art since you are able to work on your own ideas?

Ernest: Yeah.

Lisa: Okay. So what is your favorite art material to use?

Ernest: My favorite art material to use is paint and...what are the...not the colors at paint, but like the drawing materials...

Lisa: Oh, is it the oil pastels?

Ernest: Yeah!

Lisa: Yeah. So you like paint and drawing materials? How do you feel when you're creating art?

Ernest: Happy.

Lisa: Why do you think that is?

Ernest: I have no idea really.

Lisa: Well, think about what you created. What message are you trying to share with other people by drawing this?

Ernest: Oh, I was just gonna...so if this was sent to the, uh, to notch the minecraft inventor, he could have added a this mob to the, to the, uh, this like boss to mind cracks and then like whoever summons it, kinda like the witherstorm, whoever summons it, they can control it.

Lisa: Oh cool. So you have an idea for the creator of minecraft? That is so cool. Yeah, we should try to get that to them because I'm sure they want to hear it from people who actually use it so that they can make it even better and more interesting for their users. You know, because you're a user of it. Right? Do you like working better collaboratively with other people or do you like working independently better?

Ernest: I like to work with other people because they might... Like Will, he gives me more ideas to add to my, uh, to my piece of artwork here because he, he gave me the ideas of the, of the spike teeth in the gaps here and also the spikes in the other heads.

Lisa: Awesome. So you like working with other people. So even though you drew this on your own, would you still consider this as a collaborative work of art since will give you ideas about it?

Ernest: Yes.

Lisa: Okay. Interesting. Well thank you for your responses. I appreciate it. You're an amazing artist. Thank you.

Interview with Nadine.

Lisa: How do you feel about choosing what you get to create in art this year? Remember how last year we had projects assigned and this year you all get to choose what you create. How do you feel about that and how do you feel about centers?

Nadine: I like it a lot.

Lisa: Why is that? How do you feel about... I mean why do you like centers better?

Nadine: Because you get to switch instead of staying at one center. You can go to everything. Paint.

Lisa: What do you like most about our art class? For you?

Nadine: Painting with friends.

(A student asked me to cut paper for her...)

Lisa: Alright. So painting with friends?

Nadine: Yeah.

Lisa: Why with friends?

Nadine: Because you get better ideas.

Lisa: Would you like to see change in our class? In our art class. And you can be totally honest. If there's something you really want to change let me know because I could change it and you guys could like it even better.

Nadine: More materials. Different kind of paints.

Lisa: So we have watercolor and acrylics. What other paints would you want? There are oil paints, but those are pretty expensive and we have so many students. Okay. So I'll think more about that. A larger variety of paints. Okay. So you like painting a lot?

Nadine: Yeah.

Lisa: Do you feel like any sort of limitations because of just having two different types of paints?

Nadine: Yeah.

Lisa: Okay. What other changes would you like to see?

Nadine: More clay.

Lisa: More materials you can build, shape, and mold?

Nadine: Yeah.

Lisa: Okay. So have more centers like that or...

Nadine: Yeah. More centers.

Lisa: So even if that means getting a box out and that be a center? What if we opened it up to where you could choose any center every time you come?

Nadine: That would be cool. It's just that there has to be a certain amount of people at each table.

Lisa: Exactly. So what if one table is full then you have to choose a different center. Maybe we keep track of the center you all choose with a card, and you can only go to a certain center a certain number of times. So if you use choose painting a certain number of times, you have to eventually move on to a different center.

Nadine: So like in a week, you have to be at each center at least once.

Lisa: Yeah, that's a great idea. Although it would have to be over a number of weeks since I only see you al once every six days. That way everyone gets a chance to be at the center they want to be at and are also exploring other centers and media. Okay, cool. That's a great idea.

Lisa: What do you like most about art? Art itself?

Nadine: Painting.

(conversation with another student)

Lisa: All right. Tell me about a time you felt excited about something you created.

Nadine: When we made the one with the watch.

Lisa: Oh yeah, I remember that.

Nadine: Everyone would ask, “what time is it?”

Lisa: That’s great.

Interview with Eve.

Lisa: Hello, Eve.

Eve: Hello.

Lisa: Do you like being able to choose what to create an art?

Eve: I do like the being able to choose what to do in art. I'm glad we asked stations, um, because you get to choose what you want to do in that station, particular station.

Lisa: Okay, cool. Do you wish that there was a different way that we chose centers?

Eve: I, um, like how we go in rotations of centers. I'm glad there's a choice center. Um, like one center choose from because sometimes like well I really wanted to go to the painting station again, but you went to the collage and it just gets boring over and over, so I’m glad we have rotations. I would want to pick two. So I would like to see maybe a little bit more of all the materials at each station, but you can put it in perspective to collage or drawing or painting.

Lisa: Okay. That's interesting. Yeah, I like that. That's good feedback. Gives me something to think about to make it even better for you guys. Okay. Do you feel like you're able to, to better express yourself this way by being able to choose what you want to create?

Eve: Um, I feel like I'm able to express myself this way because, um, you know, you could paint whatever you want that expresses how you feel at the time. It’s like I said over and over again, it's good that we have many different stations, although I want to pick stations sometimes. Like you actually get to express what is there. Although I feel like some people don't really express and they just do something and then they just throw it away and they never actually think about art.

Lisa: Do you think that they learn anything in that experience?

Eve: Most people do, but I feel like some of the people just come here to play around and they never actually really express themselves or like do anything like that.

Lisa: Based on your experience, do you think student engagement has like gotten better this year from last year because they can do what they want in their artwork?

Eve: I feel like that's good. Plus like you've changed things around a little bit. It's in a good way because you've actually put labels on there and there are better painting materials.

Lisa: Yeah. Awesome. What does creativity mean to you?

Eve: Um, I think creativity, uh, I wish it was an acronym.

Lisa: You can make it one that's creative in and of itself, right?

Eve: Yep. Um, I think creativity is doing what you want and you can do many different things. So like for instance, at the paint station you can use the buckets there to measure things out, but then you could paint them. You could use the water bucket bottom of it and make a circle and then you can paint it but like put designs on it so you can still do like many different things. Creativity is using what you have there and making it creative, and I can put it as an example, my brother is creative because he uses the Legos he has in the Lego box and he makes something out of that. Like he has made a robot, he's made a flying ship, and I made houses.

Lisa: Yeah. That's awesome. So not just using the Legos, but the box itself.

Eve: Yeah, like he takes things apart but you can still, even though you're kind of sad it's taken apart, you can still use different supplies from taking apart things and making it into one. So like cut paper scraps. You could make a bicycle and cut it out or you could use, you know, like paint brushes that are cut off to make like a giraffe's head or something.

Lisa: Yeah. So even when it seems broken and scrappy, it's can be repurposed and reused. That is creative. Yeah. That was a great example of creativity. I love that.

Lisa: Describe how your creativity has improved this year?

Eve: I think my creativity has improved because I have actually seen the different techniques that you do, and I put it into perspective and put it with my artwork that makes it better, and I think it's more improved because it's not just the technique that you do, but it's all the different things that I thought of when I was younger. Like when I was in second grade, I did a little bit of a different technique where I had two pieces of paper cut out and then I kind of weaved them. You did something similar, but I added something different because of something new here that we had. All the art teachers are not the same, so you could have different techniques and put them together and improve your artwork or make it better.

Lisa: Yeah. Okay. So it's kind of like you have incorporated things that you've learned and what you have discovered on your own over the years into your own artwork?

Eve: Yeah.

Lisa: Do you think you could express yourself if I told you what to create and what to use to create it?

Eve: I feel like if I couldn't do what I wanted that time at that station with those things and not get to do it next time or on another artwork, I would feel upset and almost like dejected and crestfallen because I wouldn't be able to do what I want at that station.

Lisa: Okay. Gotcha. So you rather like go forth with your own ideas?

Eve: Yeah.

Lisa: Do you prefer our art class this way or the way it was last year?

Eve: Um, I think I personally prefer this year, like the way it was this year because you, um, from my knowledge and what you told me, like you kind of told us for 20 or 30 minutes what we were going to do and some people really wanted to work and it kind of wasted time. So I feel like I like it now because we might want a different station, but we get to use what we have there to do what we want because we can still use the techniques, but this big long lesson, it would be like a boring class or something. Like if you're an art class because you would tell us what to do and we would have to make it. But like with the other question, if you, if somebody told you something to do, would you be like upset or sad or whatever? Like I would be because you told us we had to do this and we could, even though we could incorporate like, um, paint or collage or drawing, we still could do something else or incorporate something else if we had the choice to. So I like this year is better.

Lisa: Okay. Yeah. That's great. I'm glad that you like this year. It will be like this next year, too. What do you like most about our art class? And I'll also ask what do you like least.

Eve: Well I, I mean I don't know what I like because I like most of the things. Um, I think lots of things about art class. Um, I really do like how we get to...like the painting station would be my favorite because we get to paint. I like the drawing center. I also like the choice center because even though it's not so many where people would get bored of them are too many people would go there. Um, I like how you get to have one time, like many times in the year, but one time, you know, sometimes we come to art you get to go to the choice center because a lot of times people are like, well I was just at the painting center, but I want to go there again. Or I was just at the collage and I want to go there again. Well after collage you go straight to choice. And you could do painting and you could still maybe like...painting is the hardest to bring. But like if there were chairs empty, you could maybe just go there and like do painting or real quick get it on a pallet and like go to the choice center if that's open because since there is a choice center and a painting center, you get two times to do painting. So it's not just one table, one cramped all big table. And that's what a lot of people think. They go to that center so much that the choice center is like empty and plain and paint gets everywhere on that table. And we don't want paint to get so much on that table because it's not just the painting center, it's the choice center.

Lisa: What do you least like about our art class?

Eve: I wouldn't say I don't, don't, don't, don't, really like, but if I had to pick an actual station like before I actually talk about the entire thing, I would almost say collage because it's not just me, but a lot of people think that if there are scraps, they just want a new piece of paper and they waste paper. People don't keep the scrap papers organized. One other thing is there could be drawing materials at the collage center as well.

Lisa: I agree with you. I think that should exist over there as well and that is a change that I will make.

Eve: I just feel like some people don't follow directions. Like the paintbrush hair up thing. I mean I just look at that...look at the paintbrushes and the sign. Like I don't want to put signs all over the room like go to the bathroom before you come in here, sharpen your pencil when you are at the drawing station. I don't want to do that strictly or anything, but like they never actually do it. They will put the big paintbrush in the small paintbrush container and face it down and splatter paint everywhere and put glue at the paint station or they never organize it, which it doesn't fully need to be organized, but like the glue containers in the sink when they are supposed to be at the collage station standing up and not pouring out glue...

Lisa: Yes, it is very important to take care of our materials and I think some people are more mindful like you are than others are.

Eve: You can express that because like the people never want to help and are like I just want to line up. You can tell especially when you ask them. I have a few friends who like to help, or who used to, they probably still do, but they don't really help. They used to actually help in the art room, they used to come in the art room and they would just goof off. And they would never help, but I would actually be helping and that's what kept me coming in although I kind of quit because I almost wanted to talk to my friends because I felt lonely, but I actually would help and they didn't. (Eve whispers that she has to go)

Lisa: I understand. Thank you so much.

Eve: You're welcome.

Lisa: You're awesome, Eve. Bye.

Eve: Bye.

Interview with June.

Lisa: Do you like being able to choose what to create an art?

June: Um, most of the time that there's those couple of times when I like to be guided because sometimes I don't know what to draw or what to draw. And it's just, I like, I like it both ways, whichever way and mostly comfortable with.

Lisa: Okay. Cool. Um, so a question off of that answer makes me want to ask, do you feel like when you're trying to draw something and you need help, do you think that I am able to give you the help that you need?

June: Yeah.

Lisa: Okay. Just making sure. And that's the thing about the center too. I feel like it frees up my time more to have more one on one with you guys. All right. So do you feel like you're able to better express yourself though? When you get to choose what you want?

June: Yeah, having choice makes me feel more comfortable because last time we were at the choice center and sometimes some kids when they are at collage they want to do paint or draw and it gets a little "oof" feeling. That's why choice center is better so that you don't just have to do these three. But yeah...

Lisa: Yeah, that's a good point. Okay, cool. What does creativity mean to you?

June: It just means like...(long pause)

Lisa: Just that, right? It could be anything...

June: Yeah. Creativity is to create and express your feelings.

Lisa: Yeah. Do you feel that way?

June: Yeah.

Lisa: Can you give me an example of when you have felt very creative?

June: Well, usually I like... I've always loved making slime and buying squishies, so I thought it'd be fun to make paper squishies and it just like brought out my feelings. And it's just really fun.

Lisa: That's awesome. That's such an entrepreneurial thing to invent that. When you made those squishies, you thought of something you wanted to create and I love that you brought in your own foam, your own materials that we didn't have here to go and create more squishies because you enjoy playing with them and you wanted to make them yourself, and then like distribute them. That's such like a businessperson thing to do, you know, it was very inventive is what I'm trying to say. It's your invention.

June: Yes. And it just appeared in the world.

Lisa: I love it. Describe how your creativity has improved this year. Now that we have choice-based...

June: Well, last year, I remember you teaching our class how to just do this one thing, and, I mean I still liked art class, but it wasn't my favorite anymore because we just had to do what you did, and I like to create my own things.

Lisa: Yeah. I'm glad that it's opened up for you so you can you create whatever you want to create based on your interests. Do you think you could express yourself if I told you what to create and what to use to create it?

June: Yeah.

Lisa: Yeah. Okay. So can you say more about that?

June: Yeah, like if you told me to... Well, no, because... I mean... I can possibly, but if I wanted to make um, a galaxy and you gave me a black and a yellow marker, and a paper, I wouldn't be able to create a sunset that I'd want to make.

Lisa: Yeah. I don't ever want to limit you guys like that. You were here last year. Do you prefer our class this way or the way it was last year?

June: This way.

Lisa: Okay.

June: Because last year wasn't that much fun. We never have enough time. We'd have like two minutes.

Lisa: Oh, right. Because I would be like telling you about the lesson and it goes for a long time. Yeah. I'm glad that it's not like that anymore. Do you feel anything should change about our class or is anything missing?

June: Well, I mean, the collage center. I'm little confused why it's here, but then I'm kind of glad it's there so people can learn how to use that and not just paint and drawing. And I thought maybe we could use, like make, do like science experiments, or like make squishies because not all people can purchase squishies, and I just thought it'd be fun if we could add it in. Make like a little table.

Lisa: That's awesome. I wish that I could let you all create a center that you all design and say what exactly could happen there. Maybe we could see like what sort of materials we have here that we can use for the experimentation station. I liked the idea of having an experiment station where it's like a maker space or something where you can tinker and make things.

June: Like the boys. I know they are not obsessed with making cupcakes squishies or whatever, but they can make fortnite squishies because they are obsessed with fortnite.

Lisa: Yeah. There you go. So just the theme would change. I love that.

June: And then when they get mad, they just squish it.

Lisa: Yeah. I know some people that could use that to help with certain feelings. What do you like most about our art class and then also what do you like least about it?

June: Um, my least favorite is going to collage center and my most favorite is probably going to drawing center or paint. My most favorite is probably drawing.

Lisa: So you like drawing and painting. You don't like collage that much. Do you think I should have more examples of works of art that have collage incorporated in it so people can get an idea as to what they can create. I just don't want that to stunt anyone's creativity thinking this is the only way you can do it. Anyway, what do you like most about drawing?

June: Well, I like how I can just create my own designs and not have to copy off.

Lisa: Yeah. Love it. Okay, cool. Thank you. You're awesome.

(Eve and Jo are in the background. Jo says, "yay, you did it!")

Interview with Jo.

Lisa: Hey Jo.

Jo: Hi.

Lisa: Do you like being able to choose what you want to create in art?

Jo: Yes, I do.

Lisa: Okay. Can you say more about that or like why that is?

Jo: Because you get to express your personality and you get to keep it for yourself or you can hang it up and show everybody.

Lisa: Okay, cool. I love that. Do you feel you're able to better express yourself this way? Like you were saying.

Jo: Yes, I do. Very much.

Lisa: Okay, very nice. Give me an example of a time that you felt like you were able to express yourself through art?

Jo: The art that I am doing right now with the leaves.

Lisa: Yeah.

Jo: I really like to have a little bit of nature around the, so.

Lisa: Oh, cool. Okay. What does creativity mean to you?

Jo: Creativity means that you get to like create, express, and you get to like do whatever you want. It's like you don't have to do like this one thing.

Lisa: Describe how your creativity has improved this year.

Jo: I have been more creative and I have more ideas with you showing me all of the techniques.

Lisa: Okay, cool. Awesome. I'm glad to hear that. Do you think you could express yourself if I told you what to create and what to use to create it? Like what happened last year?

Jo: No. Not really.

Lisa: Okay. Why do you think that is?

Jo: Because we don't really get to express ourselves. It's like us just doing what someone tells us to do. It's not us doing like whatever you want.

Lisa: So you were here last year, so do you prefer art our class this way or the way it was last year?

Jo: This way, right now because we get to do more stuff. It's like we kind of get to make up our own techniques, almost. It's like one time in art, I mixed some colors together. Like when me and June wanted to make this color, we made a different and more pretty color than the one we actually wanted to create.

Lisa: What was it for? What were you guys making?

Jo: We for making the, um, the map of the different worlds.

Lisa: Can you tell me about that again?

Jo: So we made different worlds that were all different colors.

Lisa: I love that.

Jo: It's called the map of magical places. And we had like snowflake kingdom...

Lisa: Which was what color?

Jo: It was blue. We had the golden beach, which was sort of like a tan. We had pearl forest, which was like a kind of like a pinkish and orangey tone. We had mint mountain, which was a light green, and we had banana castle. It was yellow. And we had rainbow, which was obviously rainbow and we had the purple sea. And we also had one bad one on there, the devil's house, which was orangey red.

Lisa: I remember. It's not that I forgot it, but I wanted to hear more from your perspective and what you were thinking when you created it.

Jo: And it was also really fun to create...

(Enter June and Eve who went to retrieve the artwork Jo was talking about, so she could see it while discussing it. Jo continues describing their artwork...)

Jo: Also the Lizard Action, which is a dark purple. And we had Gnomeville. It was like a blue green. We had cotton candy world, which was like a pink with blue dots. We had Bluetopia, which was blue. We had candy land, which was pink. Coral City, which was like a red with a little bit of pink in there. We had Purple Fairyland and Mermaidia, which was a light blue. And we had the greentown, which where they all got their crops. We had the Magical Kingdom...

Lisa: Was it a far journey to the Greentown from any of these places? How long of a drive from the golden beach to let's say coral city from the north to the south here?

Jo: It was 1,502 miles.

Lisa: Oh Man. How many hours is that? Oh, steps. Oh, okay. That's more doable.

Jo: 1,502 steps.

Lisa: Now, is that a number of you just made up now?

Jo: No.

Lisa: But you created it at some point. Right?

Jo: Yes, we did.

Lisa: Very cool. All right. I love it. Okay, another question. Thank you for explaining that to me. That's so creative. Do you feel anything should change about our art class or is anything missing?

Jo: I feel like we should do some sort of like experiments in here. Like how to make slime.

Lisa: What other sorts of experiments do you think?

Jo: We should experiment with new colors and we could name our own colors.

Lisa: What do you like most about our art class?

Jo: I really like painting and the choice center because you get to choose which station you want to go to. And not just like just painting or just collage.

Lisa: What would you choose when you're at the choice center usually? Or does it depend where you're at in your artwork?

Jo: I would choose the paint center because I really like the paint because we get to mix colors and it creates more vibrant colors.

Lisa: Do you see why, see why I have it on a rotation. So you guys explore with other media too. Do you see why I have it so that you guys go to different centers? Otherwise what would you maybe be choosing all the time that you come in here?

Eve chimes in: Yeah, and that's what we talked about last time...

Jo: Maybe we can have like only one choice center because then we could pick whatever we want!

Lisa: But then what if you only choose paint every time?

(We then went in confusing circles trying to figure out a way to keep track of the centers students choose each time they come, avoiding the evident truth of the matter, and our conversation always resulted in Jo voicing in some way that she wants to have full choice when she comes to art.)

Lisa: What do you least like about our art class?

Jo: I would love to see more techniques.

Lisa: Do you think spending more time on this would take from your time to create?

Jo: Yes.

Lisa: Which would you prefer?

Jo: More time to create art.

Lisa: Or you know what, to save on your personal art time, I show a procedure at the beginning of class like usual, and I have more visual anchor charts to where you can see different types of techniques that you can go read on your own time.

Jo: Oh yeah!

Lisa: I need more of those. That's what we need. Thank you for a great interview. You're awesome. Thank you.