

Choice-Based Art Education (CBAE) & Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB)



Investigators of Practice 2018-19
David McMichael

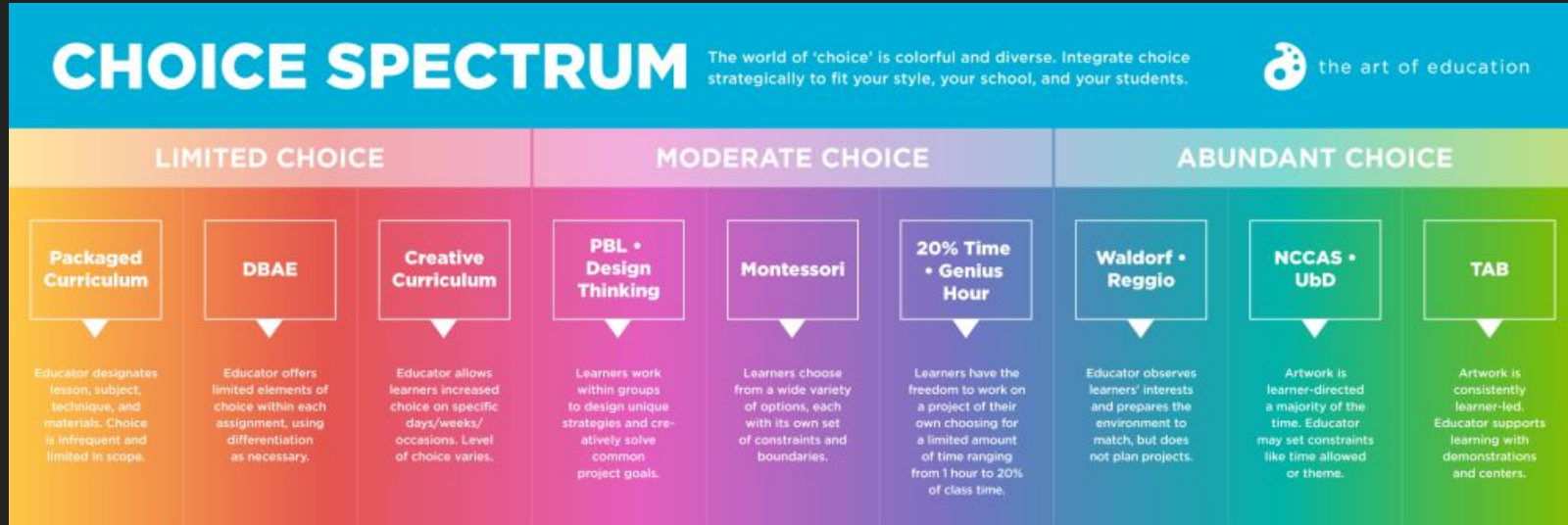
Context:



What does your audience need to know about you, your role, your classroom, your school in order to understand your work?

I am a high school art teacher in a suburban school district. I primarily teach Graphic Design, prerequisite Studio Art, and occasional Photo, and Film-Making.

What is the “problem” or issue you are studying?



I am investigating the use of Choice-Based Art Education (CBAE) and Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB).

CBAE and TAB methods contrast with the current status-quo of teacher-directed art projects which usually yield a group of student artworks that look unsurprisingly similar. This is due to the common use of teacher-directed, step-by-step, recipe-like art lesson plans.

TAB and CBAE are founded on the following 3 ideas:

What do artists do?

The child is the artist.

The classroom is the child's studio.

TAB enables students to act and be treated as artists who direct their own learning. CBAE enables students to independently choose and explore art ideas. Using these methods, students solve problems, ask questions, and seek possibilities in the classroom studio and the world around them. Students learn to persevere through difficulties and to trust their own judgment while becoming self-directed, organized, and engaged in their own creative journey.



Action Plan:



What was your research question?

Do Choice-Based Art Education (CBAE) and Teaching for Artistic Behaviour (TAB) increase student engagement and self-directed creativity?

Why did you choose it?

I chose to research these innovative methods because I found myself questioning the lack of choice and minimal artistic voice that students experience in the traditional teacher-directed art lessons currently used by myself and most art educators.

Research:

What did you read to support your inquiry? What is important to note in the literature?

My interest in CBAE was piqued when I read *Smoke and Mirrors: Art Teacher as Magician* by NAN E. HATHAWAY (May 2013 / Art Education Magazine).

This article accurately portrays the traditional art classroom as a teacher-directed space with teacher-designed projects. In the traditional art classroom, students passively comply with a teacher-directed lesson plan as they attempt to follow the prescribed directions and compare their artwork to the teacher-chosen examples.

In contrast to this “traditional mimicry-based art lesson model,” CBAE and TAB promote student-directed learning with opportunities for collaboration and spontaneous creativity.

Authentic, meaningful learning can occur when art educators rethink the traditional, mimicry-based art lesson model and instead facilitate student-directed learning, encouraging collaboration and exploration of spontaneous creativity.

Smoke and Mirrors: Art Teacher as Magician

NAN E. HATHAWAY

Every great magic trick consists of three acts. The first act is called “the pledge”—the magician shows you something ordinary, but of course, it probably isn’t. The second act is called “the turn”—the magician makes this ordinary something do something extraordinary. Now you’re looking for the secret... but you won’t find it. That’s why there’s a third act called “the prestige”—it’s the part with the twists and turns... (Nolan, 2006)

A time-honored and pervasive tradition has taken root in art classrooms. It goes like this: The art teacher plans experiences, often called “visual problems” (Vieth, 1999, p. 4), for pupils to execute. Students are then encouraged to “solve” these problems in their own way, but the end result, more often than not, is predetermined. Art teachers may contend that these assignments are open-ended and produce diverse results. And while variations on the theme are noticeable, it is an exaggeration to claim that each piece is unique. When hung together as a class set, sometimes even the student-artists who produced the work have trouble detecting which piece is “theirs.” Upon closer inspection, the artwork may in fact be recognizable as belonging to one particular artist. Unfortunately, that artist is the teacher. How can art projects, envisioned and designed by the teacher with predictable results, possibly nurture the kind of creative thinking considered essential for students to thrive in the 21st century?

Art teaches do a disservice to students when they assume too much control over their students’ work and perform a sort of magic act in the name of art education. A magic trick, discloses the master magician in the film *The Prestige* (Nolan, 2006), is performed in three acts: the pledge, the turn, and the prestige. By employing this metaphor, a parallel may be drawn between the deft skills of a creative art teacher and a magician’s sleight of hand. Both are masters of illusion and deliver well-rendered performances for their compliant audiences. But while the magician is rightly praised for nimble execution of skillful chimeras, the act of deception practiced by the art teacher is cause for concern. When product trumps process, art teachers may be managing projects instead of facilitating learning. Shouldn’t children’s art be learning made manifest and not the product of smoke and mirrors?

Student Art Produced in Three Acts

Act One: The Pledge (The Motivational Set)

Joyful students tumble into the art room. This is the time of the school day they have been waiting for. “What are we doing today?” asks the first child through the door. “Find your chair please,” replies the sly art teacher. “I will tell you when everyone is seated and listening!” The reason for withholding this information is simple: the teacher wants to control the pace of the lesson to come, to dole out information in carefully structured parts, to build mystery, suspense, interest, and motivation. It is a performance, after all, and the audience will have to wait and see.

In a magic act, the “pledge” is the set-up. It is the introduction of a trick. A box is held up, turned to expose all surfaces, examined inside and out; the box is empty. In a typical art lesson, the pledge may be thought of as the overture offered to students that discloses what is in store for them. Some call this the motivational set. It is the time during the art lesson when the teacher presents some background information and an exemplar illustrating the desired outcome: “Here is a cubist portrait by Picasso; nothing up my sleeve.” The fact is, students know that there is something up the teacher’s sleeve, just as audience members attending a magic show know they are about to be tricked. But they like playing along. The teacher announces, “Today, class, you will produce a portrait in the style of Picasso!”

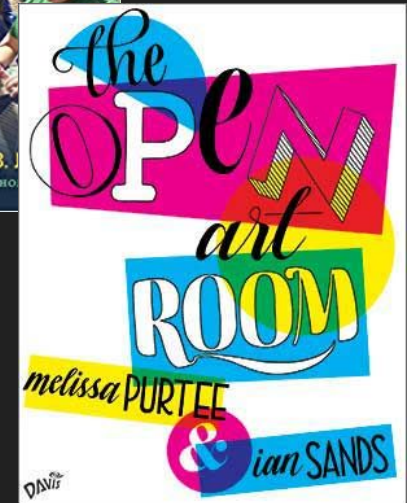
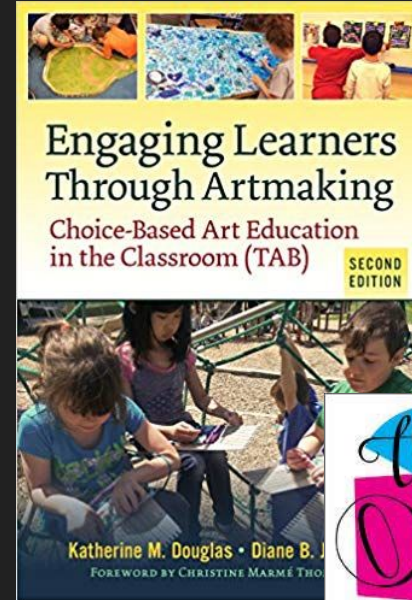
Research continued:

The following two books have been very helpful in my investigation:

Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom (TAB) 2nd Edition by Katherine M. Douglas, and Diane B. Jaquith

The Open Art Room by Melissa Purtee and Ian Sands

Engaging Learners is a good general introduction to to CBAE and TAB. *The Open Art Room* was helpful because it focuses on applying CBAE and TAB in Secondary Level (grades 6–12) Art Education.



Data:

What kind of data did you collect? How much and how often?

I took a risk by piloting a short ARTIST'S CHOICE unit at the end of my first semester Studio Art class in which students were given an open choice for their final artmaking experience. I took notes during this unit and recorded my observations of the students.

On the last day of the semester, I collected feedback using a Google Form Exit Ticket. Prior to assigning the survey, Tim Kaltenecker gave me some good suggestions to improve the format of the survey and the language so that the data would be more precise and thus more useful in analysis. These suggestions were helpful in improving the quality of data collected. This survey also provided me with a template that I am now using in other classes.

Studio Art Survey Questions

Please be open, honest and constructive in your responses below.

* Required

What is the NUMBER ONE project that you believe helped you grow as an artist and why? (Drawing Skills Unit, Negative Shapes Real Objects, LetterPerfect, PhotoShop PhotoComposite, Charcoal Drawing of Geometric Forms, Wood Relief Sculpture, Stop-Motion Animation, Artist's Choice Project): *

Your answer

What is the NUMBER TWO project that you believe helped you grow as an artist and why? (Drawing Skills Unit, Negative Shapes Real Objects, LetterPerfect, PhotoShop PhotoComposite, Charcoal Drawing of Geometric Forms, Wood Relief Sculpture, Stop-Motion Animation, Artist's Choice Project): *

Your answer

Which project was least VALUABLE to your growth as an artist and why? (Drawing Skills Unit, Negative Shapes Real Objects, LetterPerfect, PhotoShop PhotoComposite, Charcoal Drawing of Geometric Forms, Wood Relief Sculpture, Stop-Motion Animation, Artist's Choice Artwork): *

Your answer

The ARTIST'S CHOICE project is a new idea for Studio Art. What is your opinion about this experience? Explain: *

Your answer

Did the ARTIST'S CHOICE project help you grow as an artist? Explain: *

Your answer

What could improve ARTIST'S CHOICE? *

Your answer

What changes could improve this course (Studio Art) for the future? *

Your answer

SUBMIT

Data Results:

Below are the survey questions and responses that provided the most relevant data. Twelve students were present on the last day of the semester, one student was absent. The questions were short-answer format. I analyzed and categorized the responses.

“Did the ARTIST'S CHOICE project help you grow as an artist? Explain:”

Yes: 12

No: 0

“What could improve ARTIST'S CHOICE?:”

No Change: 4

More Suggestions/Samples: 3

More Time: 3

More Materials/Media Options: 2

“What changes could improve this course (Studio Art) for the future?”

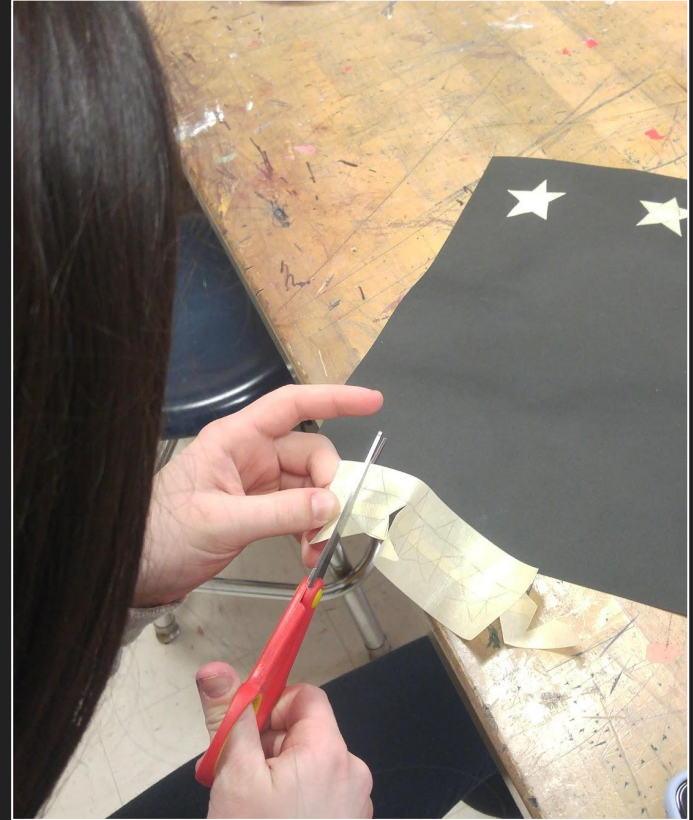
No Change: 4

More Choice: 4 (each of these responses included the word “CHOICE”)

More Time: 2

Less Drawing: 1

Experiment with more/different media: 1



Interpreting The Data:

The unanimous positive response to the first question about the ARTIST'S CHOICE unit indicates that students believe Choice-Based Art Education fosters and enables artistic growth.

I believe that all of the students' suggestions in response to "What could improve Artist's Choice" are valid and on-target:

- It would be beneficial to have more art idea suggestions and a variety of student-created visual samples to help students envision artmaking possibilities.
- More time should be allocated for Artist's Choice unit so that students have the opportunity to develop ideas and try different media.
- Drawing units could be shortened into "Boot Camps" (short skill-building exercises) to make more time for Artist's Choice.
- More materials and media options would activate more artistic creativity and more choices.



Implications:

What conclusions do you draw from your action research project? What are the implications for practice?

CBAE and TAB increase student engagement and promote student-directed creativity. After implementing a pilot unit, I am trying to learn more about structuring a choice-based syllabus and managing a choice-enhanced classroom. I am also in the process of adding more choice to current units (a.k.a. Modified Choice) in all courses that I currently teach.



New Questions:

What new questions do you have?

- Will scaling up CBAE and TAB methods in Studio Art and other courses continue to increase student engagement and student-directed creativity?
- How can CBAE and TAB be structured so that there is a satisfactory balance between art skills development and open-choice personal expression?
- How can an art classroom and syllabus be better organized to facilitate CBAE and TAB



Future Research

What do you recommend for future research?

For future research, Michael Chunev and I received a BHEF Grant to attend the TEACHING FOR ARTISTIC BEHAVIOR SUMMER INSTITUTE 2019 AT THE MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, JULY 7-13, 2019. At this institute, we will acquire plans, tools, and strategies to implement a choice-based art curriculum.

MAKING ARTISTS, this Institute's theme, emphasizes instruction for student-directed processes and studio practices in PreK-12 TAB classrooms. The Institute comprises classroom and studio activities, exhibits, and a pre-Institute online component. During the week, there are all-attendee sessions as well as breakout sessions on site, split into grade level cohorts (elementary, middle, high school) as well as mixed groupings, by interest in a particular issue or theme. Among this summer's focus topics are: instruction, assessment, and studio practices to meet the diverse needs of all learners in PreK-12 TAB art programs.

HOME / CONTINUING EDUCATION / ADULTS

TEACHING FOR ARTISTIC BEHAVIOR (TAB)



SUMMER 2019 INSTITUTE AT MASSART: JULY 7-13, 2019

Spend a week in historic Boston with TAB educators to develop and expand understandings about choice-based pedagogy in Pre K-12 art programs.

Making Artists, this summer's theme, emphasizes instruction for student-directed processes and studio practices in Pre K-12 TAB classrooms.

