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

Investigators of Practice 2018-19
David McMichael
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.
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.

https://teachingforartisticbehavior.org/index.html
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.
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 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.
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.
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
For future research, Michael Chuney 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.