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Contemporary Issues in Art Education  
Issues Paper  
August 6, 2015

## Choice-Based Art Education Curriculum for students with Emotional Behavior Disorders

Art classrooms are made up of all different individuals. “There is no one lesson and no one way to provide instruction in visual art that will satisfy all the curiosities, interests, and personalities in a classroom of learners (Douglas & Jaquith, 1).” Art in a typical elementary school involves teachers having the students gather to learn the new artists of inspiration, the steps and materials needed to complete the projects, students working on their own version of the project, and then art being displayed for all to see. “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 (Hathaway, 9).” Art is a chance for investigation, exploration, and experimentation through discussing thoughts and use of materials. When students come into art class with emotional behavior disorders, where is their chance to express their emotions, if lessons are presented to them with a final goal already planned out? In an elementary art classroom, how can a teacher introduce artists and materials that will allow for creative exploration through assignments?

“The art teacher plans experiences, often called “visual problems” 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 (Hathaway, 9).”

Looking at how typical elementary art classrooms are structured, how can a shift be made from teacher-directed to student-directed art making? Creating a safe environment is the first step for any classroom, especially for classrooms with emotional support students. Providing opportunities for students to explore their interests and have the opportunity to collaborate with the teacher and peers is a way for intrinsic motivation to prosper. “Choice allows teachers and students to honor authentic learning processes and value intrinsic motivation. Students who believe in their work are motivated and engaged (2008, 6).” Teaching new methods for making and creating in centers allows for movement and responsibility in the classroom that gives the students a chance to experiment and explore art making methods that can help convey their interests through their art.

Art teachers do a majority of the work for the students through planning the lesson, materials, and creating teacher samples for inspiration. “It may be that the one who receives and benefits from the creative experience typical of a school art project is not the student but the teacher. The art teacher, not the child, is the inventor, the selector, the decision maker, the problem finder and the problem solver (Hathaway, 11).” Creating a more open-ended lesson for students to truly have diverse outcomes is something that art classrooms should strive for. Investigation, exploration, and experimentation are the foundations for students to express themselves through their art and make their own decisions. “There should be many ways in which a student can make decisions to create their own version of the assignment (Dewhurst, 11).” Looking at the typical lesson for students where all of the possible problems have been

worked out for the most successful outcome for all students, where is their chance to become problem finders and solvers? “When product trumps process, art teachers may be managing projects instead of facilitating learning (Hathaway, 9).”

“To encourage the process of connecting, educators should develop lesson plans and activities that encourage learners to reflect on their own identities, experiences, and interests to help them identify project topics that are meaningful and rooted in students’ own lives (Dewhurst, 11).” Looking at typical art projects, how can the teacher be taken out of the planning process to allow for students to express themselves? “Art offers a gateway for students with emotional differences because it necessarily engages experimental learning opportunities, and allows students to access content without initially using spoken or written language (Johnson, 91).” When students have a chance to choose what artwork they make, they can discuss it easily, can describe their working process, and evaluate the effectiveness of the finished work.

“In order to implement the kind of thinking and learning that honors and develops the creative ability of each child, movement is needed away from teacher-contrived art problems towards more personalized, learner-directed practices (Hathaway, 11).” Choice-based art education is a way to reach all students and allow for them to create their own self-directed artwork that holds personal meaning to them. “There is a shift from teacher-chosen projects, media, or themes, to a learner-directed classroom where students are given a choice over what they create (Douglas & Toole, 14).”

In an art room students need to feel safe, so that students can explore what makes them unique. “The majority of students with EBD thrive when they are given structured, safe, artistic

freedom to create (Johnson, 97).” Students with EBD in a choice-based art classroom have more freedom to explore different materials that will allow them to use problem solving skills in order to reach a finished artwork that expresses their view on the world around them. Looking at students disruptive behaviors often means that the “children who lack stimulation from touch and physical movement seek other ways to satisfy their brain, usually through aggression and violence (Hotvedt, 71).” A choice-based art classroom allows for students to move around to different centers. Giving students a chance to work like studio artists and have ownership of their artwork gives them the ability to have a sense of responsibility. Students are taught that artists make art about things that truly interest them and what they are curious about. When doing the work of the artist, students will be expressing their own ideas. “Choice-based art education provides for the development of artistic behaviors by enabling students to discover what it means to be an artist through the authentic creation of artwork (Douglas & Jaquith, 3).”

Choice-based art education rather than pre-determined lesson plans in an elementary school offers students to have individualized curriculum that is self-directed. The art teacher and the students work together to find the students interests that can be shown through their artwork. “When teachers facilitate for personalized learning, students are more likely to reach for potential that may be overlooked or obstructed by standardized curriculum, which leaves little time for divergence and discovery (Hathaway & Jaquith, 26).” Typically in an art class teachers can engage with students while they are working on their projects and get to know their students, but when hundreds of students walk in and out of the classroom door, how can a teacher keep track of their students interests on a more personal basis to help with facilitating that into their artwork?

“Choice-based teachers can differentiate for individual artistic behaviors and preferences readily because they know their students well. No one is invisible in art class (Douglas & Jaquith, 35).” This idea is important in any classroom because children need to know they are individuals and that no one way of learning or creating can be determined for students. “Studio-classrooms meet children where they are developmentally and artistically and support learning on a child-by-child basis (Hathaway, 15).” A teacher is able to present new artists and methods for making in a short introduction of each class. These artists and methods for making presented to each class allow for students to take what they want from the discussion and apply it to their work. Looking at this way of presenting materials, the teacher is able to introduce artists and materials that will allow for creative exploration. Students are able to make many works of art or take their time on one work during a given time frame set up by the teacher and student.

“Teaching for artistic behavior sets up the circumstances for art making to happen on a personal and individual basis. Students with multiple learning styles find a prosperous environment in a choice-based classroom's flexibility and open-ended curriculum. When students are given good information and the responsibility to use it, their work often exceeds teacher expectations as students find their artistic voice (2008, 35).”

After getting to know the students teachers can set up centers for the students that have a menu of ideas to get started with the variety of materials in centers such as ceramics, painting, drawings, collage, sculpture, etc. Weekly demonstrations allow for students to learn new methods that can be used that day, or saved for another time. The students “are responsible for

developing their own ideas, subject matter, materials, and techniques; setting-up their workspace; and working to completion (Douglas & Toole, 14).”

Art class is a place where interdisciplinary curriculum can be integrated and overlapped with what students are learning in art. Art doesn’t only teach skills with different mediums or facts about art history, but a whole plethora of skills that can be used in everyday life. “A strong arts foundation builds creativity concentration, problem solving, self-efficacy, coordination, attention, and self-discipline (Hotvedt, 73).” Allowing students to direct their own learning is a way for creativity to become abundant. “Creativity in school art programs thrives when learners are intrinsically motivated and have full autonomy to problem find and solve, defer, revise, redirect, and work at their own pace (19).”

When students are creating artwork that is self-directed it allows for them to make personal connections. Having personal connections to the artwork means that the students will be more intrinsically motivated. “While students self-direct their work, they develop skills in inquiry, reflection, and evaluation. They practice ideation, make decisions, find relevance and create meaning (Hathaway & Jaquith, 28).” Having the students set their goals for themselves and reflect on their work they are making is a way to begin applying the skills that will be needed outside of the art classroom. Art is a place where students really can begin to explore their views on the world around them. “As art is created from the meaningful content of students’ lives, teachers will find that interesting issues related to multiculturalism and visual culture will arise. Students and teachers can address these issues in an ongoing and organic manner to shape student self-discovery and learning (2008, 6).”

Students are held accountable daily for their progress and need time for reflection. Choice-based art education utilizes multiple forms of assessment to support student and teacher growth. Artistic behaviors are noted in the ongoing daily assessment process. This daily reflection can take the form of sharing work with the group, pair-sharing of what the students did that day, or by questions prompted by the teacher that are open-ended. When projects are completed, rubrics that are negotiated between the students and the teachers, and are broad enough to affirm diverse learning styles are completed. This form of assessment holds the student accountable for the choices they are making in their artwork and how they are using the art classroom.

George Szekely sums up the role of the art teacher for their students from *Encouraging Creativity in Art Lessons*:

“The essential goal of art teaching is to inspire children to behave like artists—to try on the artist’s role—to feel what it is to gather an idea on one’s own and act on it. The goal is to reveal to children that art comes from within themselves—not from the teacher. The goal is to demystify art, and assure children, through the teacher’s deeds and words, that art is found in familiar places and ordinary environments, accessible to everyone. It is to bring children closer to art—nearer to themselves, to their own views and visions.”

Often students that are making typical art projects directed by the teacher rush to get a chance to free-draw. When students do this they want a chance to express their own ideas. Looking back at the initial issue presented, how can a teacher introduce artists and materials that will allow for creative exploration through assignments? This is a chance for teachers to create more open ended art lessons or begin to have choice-based art education centers implemented into their own classrooms. Keeping demonstrations short to allow for introductions of new artists

and methods of making brief, will allow for students to explore more while they are creating their own works of art. This will ensure that students can investigate, explore, and experiment through discussing thoughts and use of materials.

During my time teaching in different environments I have been able to experiment with different teaching methods. I have found that allowing children to play and experiment in their own ways allows for all students to express themselves, become more comfortable in an art classroom, and open-up to myself as the teacher and their peers. When I was first beginning to teach during my undergraduate classes I didn't realize I was teaching in a more choice-based manner. By giving my students example artists and materials to experiment with, I was able to get many different results from my students. By doing more research, I found that choice-based art education has been explored in many art classrooms and there is a shift happening towards this style of teaching art.

In my own personal classroom I have typical students and a large population with EBD that have their own style of art. Although, I try to keep my curriculum more open-ended there is still a sense of structure trying to meet all of the yearly district goals for my students. My ultimate goal is to allow students to have a sense of ownership in their artwork. I have a more traditional structured art classroom that allows for self-expression and experimentation, but I am making the shift towards a more choice-based structured art classroom for my K-5 students. I hold my students to a high standard of being artists and maintaining their environment that they are working in. I feel that now I have taught my students a lot about the basics of art I can have them venture into more open-ended self-directed projects.



Students with EBD all find a way to put their artistic touches into their works of art. This year I am going to make a jump into creating more centers for my students and create an action-research based reflection on my findings for my schools population. I want my students to be able to really explore in the art classroom. Discovering their interests and expanding upon them through creative expression is something that has often been limited for them in their past art experiences.

My goal in the next school year is to put my focus back on the process of making art and not on the final outcome. I will continue to reflect on what is working and what is not and make appropriate changes. I feel a successful choice-based art program needs to be structured and organized, two things that I feel I am strong at already. As the teacher I need to make sure I know my students and what they are capable of doing so I can push them further. Hopefully implementing choice-based art in my classroom will allow for my students to become more confident in their art and themselves, so that they can learn the skills necessary to become independent thinkers in and out of the art room.

Teaching in the same school for a second year is something that I feel I already have a head start on. Working with the children and knowing them from last year is a big help. I know some of their weak and strong points, I know a little about their personal life through working with them one on one in the classroom and through parent teacher conferences. I feel that a choice-based approach or TAB (teaching for artistic behavior) is something that together we can make the shift towards. Observing their behaviors and through conversations in the classroom along with talking to their other teachers and paraeducators I feel this year we can work together

to make sure all students can get the most out of their time in art class and implement the skills learned in art to their other classes and in their everyday lives.

Other important parts of a choice-based art program is making sure that I am well versed in art history and able to communicate my knowledge in a fun and enthusiastic way so the children want to learn and grow in their knowledge in history and art making. I try to do this now and feel that I have made great strides in this area because of the positive feedback that I have received from fellow teachers, the principal and the parents of the students. Hearing from the children that art is their favorite class makes me realize that I must be doing something right.

The other key thing that I will need to figure out is dealing with the needs of those who have trouble working on their own. Freedom for some is not always what is best for those who need structure. I want to make sure all students can succeed in art and pursue their artistic side to the fullest. A choice-based art room will take time to have a sense of routine and familiarity. Change can sometimes be hard, especially for students with EBD. I feel by allowing students to have more control over their own decisions and concepts to explore, ultimately it will allow for students to each find something they can enjoy. It will take time to find balance and to make all students realize that it's going to be okay and together we are going to make it work. I think that as the art teacher transitioning my students to a more choice-based classroom will allow for artists and materials to be introduced, while achieving the goal of creative exploration through self-directed assignments .

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