

Choice Based Art Education in the Middle School Classroom

by

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the engagement of students when they are presented choices in the art classroom. This method follows the vision of Maria Montessori who created a boundary choice program promoting child growth and learning through choice. This study looks at the middle school age group that is typically described as the trough of a U curve of aesthetic growth by Howard Gardner. Through this study there was an exploration of student thoughts on choice, choice in Montessori schools in the United states, and how that might work in a traditional classroom. Do students become more engaged when given choices, and what choices do they respond to? Through the data collection I was able to see that the different grade levels made decisions differently. I was able to allow the students to give input and discuss their level of engagement with the works of art that they were creating. The data collected allowed me to make comparisons between those that were given choices and those that were not. Gaining their opinions on choice allowed me to see what the students wanted or were drawn to. My study looked at choice based art with authentic responses from those it would affect most.

Choice Based Art Education in the Middle School Classroom

A Thesis

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Master of Arts in Education in Art Education

By

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

"It is a conventional wisdom of longstanding that the drawings of middle childhood represent a marked qualitative decline from those of younger children" (Duncum, 2003, p. 69). The "U-curve" is the term coined to describe this decline and then rise as the individuals reach adulthood. The reason for this decline in the drawing has many unknowns. The goal though to change the pattern of the U-curve has been to work towards increasing engagement levels within the classroom. Boundary choice education which is also described as The Montessori Method would give the students more choice in the classroom. "The Montessori Method of education, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, is a child-centered educational approach based on scientific observations of children from birth to adulthood" (Introduction to Montessori, 2016, p. 1). This pilot study examined the effects of choice based lessons within the middle school classroom.

"After leaving the elementary grades, students report a steady decline in interest, choice, and enjoyment in classroom activities" (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 61). This absence of choice is what this study researched. The goal of my study was to see if engagement in Montessori classroom methods increased and changed interest and work level. "At the broadest level, Montessori students perceived their schools and teachers as more supportive of their individual interests (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 73)." A phrase used to describe a setting like this is supportive collaborative community. The students were allotted more choice in their learning and comfort levels changed. This study looked specifically at middle school students. There has been success in elementary classrooms. This is noted in the writings of Katherine Douglas, Diane Jaquith, and Anne Bedrick. Their ideas will be detailed further and

shows how some of them have been adapted at middle levels and even at the high school level. Education today has been moving towards readying the student for the 21st century. The student needs to be able to collaborate, think creatively, make use of technologies, think critically, and problem solve. Giving choices or allowing students to self-direct their learning has been shown to work on these skills within each student in a way that caters to their learning styles and their personal strengths.

Choice in the art classroom does not stop at the Montessori Method. Choice based art encompasses many levels and approaches. The teacher is able to lead and decide where they feel comfortable and how much choice they want to start with. The process of choice and way the teacher approaches choice is looked at further in the review of literature. In comparison to Montessori there are Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) and Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB). There have been many studies done on DBAE and Montessori in the Elementary level art classrooms whereas studies in secondary classrooms are scarce (Day, 1987). The Getty Center for Education in the Arts was the center championing DBAE.

Following the Montessori principles of instruction the student has more ownership. "The purpose of the materials is to learn through discovery of the ability to choose. A Montessori classroom allows the child to see that he has to make a choice and that he must choose constantly (Adams, 1970, p. 126)." My research evaluated boundary choice or the Montessori Method for effectiveness in the classroom. The other methods for choice in art education are also described in detail. How the students react to the boundary choice lesson and what they create when they are given choices can set the tone for their learning for years to come. It also adds insight into ways that they may or may not be able to interact on a professional level once they complete their subsequent education. I feel this opens up new avenues for further research and ideas on the

subject of Choice-based education. My research falls under the assessment and evaluation section of the research agenda created by the National Art Education Association.

Statement of the Problem

Middle school is a key timeframe in the life of a student. In Art Education, the engagement levels of the middle school student seemingly begin to dwindle when it comes to both their creative and critical thinking skills. The purpose of my study was to determine whether allowing the students more freedom of choice on projects and art at the middle school level would increase their engagement levels with the curricula and increase their personal levels of creativity. My research also looked more deeply at the range of choice that could be approached by the teacher.

Research Questions

Does a choice based art education curriculum allow students to re-engage by supplying them with the choice of creative means to fit their needs and comfort? This study was looking deeper into what the student themselves thought about having choices in their work. Does the student create work that is stronger, more thought out, and have deeper connections when that student is given a variety of choices? What types of choices do the students respond to more? Do some students want to freely use materials and have a set theme for their work? Looking into these questions and examining how the students worked throughout the study would supply insight into ways to aid the student in their learning. Through this study I hoped to show that the students responded to the choices and that their work reflected a student that was more engaged. I hoped to show that the student was able to exhibit 21st century skills through the use of choices.

The students being able to show how to problem solve through the development of their own themes, the choice in materials that suited their project, and self-reflection of their work.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to see if students become more engaged in art lessons when they are presented with choice. Choice in this case will be materials as well as project variations targeting the same N.C. Standards. The N.C. standards are a group of items that the students should know when they leave each grade. These build upon each other and provide a framework of the skills the students will need throughout their future. The reasoning behind the study is that there is research showing a drop in engagement levels of students at the secondary levels in art education. This study shows the results in a controlled form to determine if freedom and autonomy in the art classroom is a factor in the drop in engagement by students at this middle school level.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

What is Choice-Based Art Education? History, Theory and Practice

Choice based art education started in the 1970s with an idea of accommodating all student needs and ideas. There was the need to provide authentic art experiences. What started out as a way to give the students a more authentic experience changed into what we know today as TAB and more broadly choice based art. Choice based art education is a way to support “multiple modes of student learning” (Teaching for Artistic Behavior, 2017). There is a diverse body of students in schools who are taught in a one size fits all style. This does not work though. Differentiation is needed to allow content and ideas to both reach and emerge from students. For the arts there needed to be and still needs to be rethinking of the curriculum and how we teach the students. Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith created a list of what a curriculum in the arts needs to include. The choice-based classroom uses each of these five items to create a stronger learning environment for students. A few of those items are as follows:

1. Curriculum that emerges out of student-directed learning rather than explicit directions, eliminating the endless search for new lesson plans
2. Curriculum flexible enough to meet the unique needs of individuals and classes while addressing visual arts standards
3. Motivated students who bring their art ideas to class and engage in meaningful work

4. Students starting without your assistance, setting up materials, and putting them away when they are finished

5. Learners successfully forming their own collaborative groups, coaching peers, and assisting with classmates' challenges. (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, pp. 1-2)

Choice based art education takes the classroom from teacher-directed to student-directed. In the classroom projects and lessons have been traditionally crafted in a way where there is a set outcome for all students. The lesson would have one theme, one material, and more often than not a whole classroom of very similar works of art. The Bernard Bull chart seen in figure 1 shows the differences in teacher-directed and self-directed. The lesson is not completely laid out for the students in a self-directed classroom. The students ask the questions about the learning. The students are the ones that make the conclusions and show the learning in their work, responses, and presentations. The planning in this process is also done by the student. As shown in the table the student now asks how they will monitor their own progress. "It is unlikely that students will become knowledgeable about their own artistry unless they have the means to self-direct their work throughout the year" (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p.3).

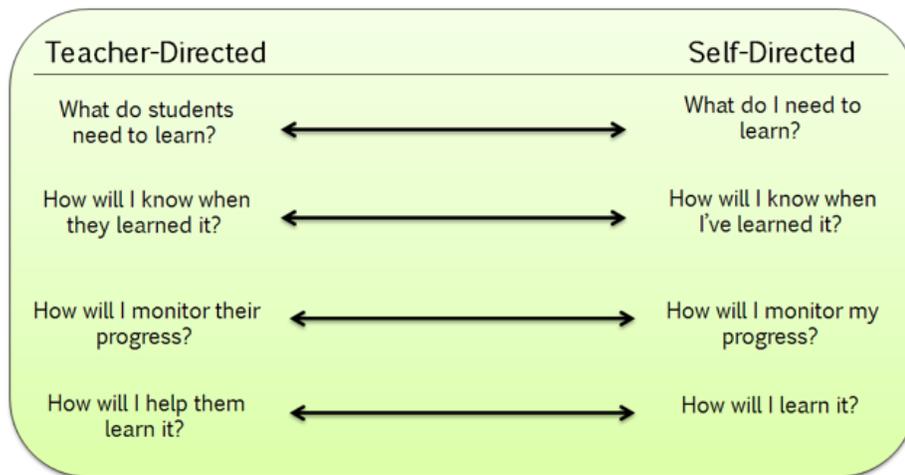


Figure 1: Bernard Bull chart on teacher and student directed lessons

Retrieved from <https://thinkstitcher.com/tag/learner-choice/>

Levels of Choice Based Art Education and Their Similarities and Differences to Traditional Art Education Practice

Choice based Art Education has many variations that range in the amount of freedoms given to students in the classroom. Boundary choice as I have learned in this study allows the students to have choices guided with a set series of objectives. “The Montessori Method is a boundary choice form of education developed by Maria Montessori. Montessori was firstly a scientist and studied methods to assist special needs children with learning, and then branched out to all students” (Thayer-Bacon, 2012, p. 5). The Montessori Method goes to the base level when looking at the differences in learning between children and adults. “We must constantly bear in mind the fundamental difference between the child and the adult. The child is in a

continual state of growth and metamorphosis” (Adams, 1970, p. 124). The child is growing and experiencing and in turn shouldn’t be constrained by adult style responsibilities. “This method then is made to allow the students freedom in a controlled environment through which they will become aware of their accomplishments in indirect means” (Adams, 1970, p. 124). Within this Method is the belief that students should be free to learn for themselves and develop through independent means.

Though independent work and exploration is the idea of the instruction, it did not mean without guidance and training. There needed to be a correct use of materials known by all students. “Montessori said that the educated hand is the free hand...In developing in the child a sense of true liberty, the Montessori environment provides for the child a chance to achieve control over himself and his environment...a child develops a concept of work...because it pleases him, not because of any external aim...as the child masters himself, knows himself, and is able to function to his own satisfaction, he is ready to move out and to socialize” (Adams, 1970, p. 127). Montessori’s method was first applied to elementary schools when she opened her first school called ‘*Casa dei Bambini*’ in Italy (Thayer-Bacon, 2012, p. 7). The method can be applied to middle school age students and there are some schools across the nation which follow the method.

In an article written by Kevin Rathunde and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi the authors looked at five Montessori schools and reported “higher intrinsic motivations, interest, and flow experience in academic work than students from a demographically matched set of traditional middle schools” (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 60). Their study looked at student relationships in the school with peers and teachers, work ethic, amount of time at work and types of work done. They noted that there is a “steady decline in interest, choice, and enjoyment in the

classroom activities in the middle grades. Part of this decline might be related to the greater use of textbooks, formalized instruction, elimination of student choice, reduction in the variety of information and minimal real world application” (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 61). There have been many changes over the years in the way that the classroom is approached, what is valued, what needs to be taught, and how. Policies have changed and processes have evolved and some have devolved. Currently we are in a data driven curriculum with common core and standardized testing at its center. There are both positives and negatives. But what does it do for student creativity and engagement?

The middle grades are the grades my study was concentrating on. The study by Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi noted the drop in overall engagement with during the secondary school levels. “It is a conventional wisdom of long standing that the drawings of middle childhood represent a marked qualitative decline from those of younger children” (Duncum, 2003, p. 69). The U-curve is a measure of artistic development proposed by Howard Gardner that is used to show this. The U-curve is said to show that artistic development is strong at young ages, when the child is first exploring art, materials, and the world around them. It then shows a steady decline as they age. The decline of artistic development and exploration becomes evident during the middle school and early high school years. The students then have an increase in their artistic development and engagement in late high school, college, and on into adulthood. There are many thoughts and reasons as to why there is a decline during the middle and early high school years. Some thoughts revolve around peer pressure to not show individuality or stand out past others, self-doubt, and even experiences out of the student’s control. “When examining development with a long-term perspective, middle childhood drawings have been regarded as the trough of a U-curve” (Duncum, 2003, p. 69). The middle ages are the age range that this study is showing

has the least amount of creativity and effort in their work. The students go through a period of self-doubt regarding their work. They are also looking to aim for their work to be realistic and true to form (Duncum, 2003).

“The decline is said to occur in children between the ages of five and fourteen, with the trough of the U being most evident between the ages of nine and twelve” (Duncum, 2003, p. 71). The middle ages are also the time when studies have shown that students “more readily pick up the convention-acquiring process that will remain operational for a lifetime” (Duncum, 2003, p. 73). This is a time that that students are working on communication and getting their ideas across. A notion that Howard Gardner states is evident in middle childhood. The U Curve though should not be confused with a process of measuring student development artistically. Children do have varying levels of development and instead it looks just at aesthetical ideas and creation. An example of the U-curve can be seen in figure 2.

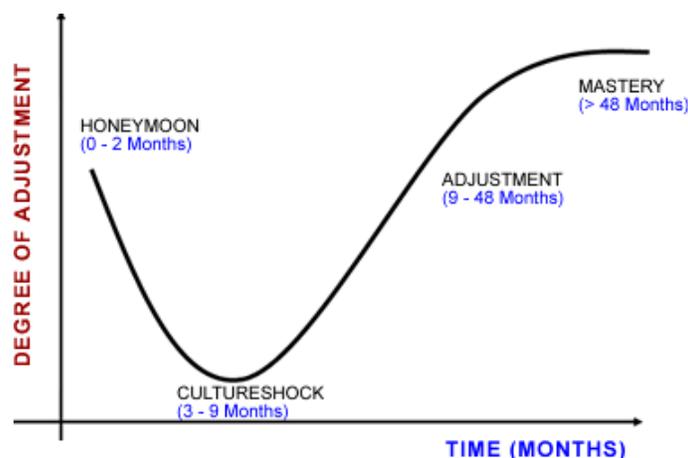


Figure 2: U Curve Example

In the study done by Kevin Rathunde and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi they stated that students reported that active tasks like experiments helped them to learn. Students excelled when tasks were more collaborative as well. Could then choice in one classroom in a traditional school setting engage students more and in turn help them to learn more? Will the students respond to the idea?

DBAE

As stated before there are a variety of ways to teach choice in the classroom. Another method is Discipline Based Art Education. “Formal schooling, as we know it, is a relatively recent development in human history. The simple and obvious fact is that much learning takes place without the benefits of a “formal, continuous, sequential, written curriculum” (Hausman, 1987, p. 57). This then is where DBAE would factor in. The Getty Center developed DBAE and stated that there was a need for “formal, continuous, written curriculum across grade levels in the same way as other academic disciplines” (Hausman, 1987, p. 56). This style of teaching does not allow for the freedoms of choice as seen in the Montessori Method. It is a stricter learning process that scaffolds the learning and processes covered. It is sequentially created similar to a timeline in history. The choices made in the lessons are set forth by the teacher.

TAB

Choice Based Art Education and TAB allow the students to be the director of their learning. With choice based Art and TAB the students are the ones exploring the themes, materials, and finding what they are comfortable with and making connections to the world, themselves, and the learning. There is not one path when it comes to teaching Art in a classroom setting. “By teaching for artistic behavior, educators facilitate authentic choices for students and honor their ideas for artmaking” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 9). TAB looks at more than just one learning path. There are many different learning styles and paths that students take every day. TAB takes into account all the students and all the different ways that those students learn and create. There are four practices in the TAB pedagogy that Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith describe. Those practices for teachers to refer to are students as artists, pedagogy, classroom content, and assessment. Each of these practices are to aid the teacher in their teaching practice. The first practice really speaks volumes for the approach. It emphasizes that the student is the artist. The student should have the control over the content of their art, materials they use, and how they approach the creative process. “Choice practice allows teachers and students to value authentic learning processes and intrinsic motivation” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 10). DBAE and traditional teaching practices have the teacher as the one deciding on the content and the material. As teachers we have been giving them exactly what we want them to create without their creative input. The student in a choice classroom is able to make deeper connections to both their work and why they are creating it. They are given the chance to learn about how they personally create and what they like to use to create. The student as an artist also means to give them the time to create and develop their ideas.

This is only strengthened by the other three processes in this approach to learning. Through pedagogy the teacher tackles the approach in the way that best suits them and their

comfort level. It explores the vast range of levels of teaching available now to them and directions that they can go. This goes the same for the student. Students are able to be completely self-directed or gain assistance and varying levels of differentiation from the teacher, peers, and others that may provide guidance.

In the choice based classroom the way the classroom is laid out and presented changes as well. “The ideal learning environment for student-driven artmaking requires the efficient structure of time, careful arrangement of space, and thoughtful choice of materials” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 13). The approach to the breakdown of class time is done in a way that the students are not sitting listening to a lecture for the majority of the class time or watching a demonstration that may take up a large chunk of that class time. There is ample time provided for the student to explore and work. The way the class is run is changed all the way down to the set up and availability of materials. There is an open studio feeling to the room where all that the student sees is available to them for their art making processes.

The last piece in teaching for artistic behavior is the assessment piece of the puzzle. Assessment is the piece that every teacher knows the schools and school systems are looking for. It is where they can show the individual student growth, understanding, and learning processes. “Multiple assessments inform teaching, resulting in materials and instructions that are closely aligned with student needs. Teachers create manageable methods for collecting data on student progress utilizing checklists, photo documentation, dialogues, and student writing” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 14).

TAB classrooms allow the students to do more than just follow directions and mimic. There is the opportunity for students to understand and learn what it means to BE an artist.

Through the introduction and demonstration of materials the students are able to make connections to how an artist creates and experiments. There is authentic learning happening that presents itself through meaningful interactions. The way TAB presents itself to students allows them to make stronger connections since they are the ones discovering and creating their learning. In a TAB classroom “the learning is organized around studio centers complete with materials, tools, and resources necessary for each medium” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 5). In TAB there are not boundaries in place for the student learning. The students are able to craft their learning. “Confidence, perseverance, risk taking, and innovation are true outcomes of authentic art teaching and learning” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 40).

Problems with Choice Based Art in the Classroom and Solutions

Throughout the literature on Choice-based instruction, there are many probable issues that come up in the approach, implementation, and everyday processes in a choice-based art classroom. Advice for teachers planning to start in choice is to start small. The fear for many is being overwhelmed and that the classroom will be chaotic and unorganized. When I first decided on working on choice in my classroom I was not sure where to begin. This was echoed by many and the question other teachers had when attending lectures on Choice and researching how to get started.

One of the first problems for Choice-based art for many teachers is how to start. “If you decide to try teaching with choice, start small and start slowly” (Bedrick, 2012, p. 204). Sound

advice from Anne Bedrick is to go slowly. Start with one project with choices of materials. Allowing them to use any material that they would want and having the materials readily available to them allows them to work freely and move towards something they may feel comfortable with. For Anne Bedrick the first center to open and allow for an introduction into the choices is the drawing center.” This is a good time to begin reinforcing independent habits; they may not move to another center until they clean up where they were working, leaving it ready for the next student” (Bedrick, 2012, p. 303). Rules and expectations for the room are gone over at this time. The students then know how to move through the room and take care of the supplies.

Organization of the classroom is another large problem for many teachers. Where to start, how to arrange the room, and how to organize the materials are all challenges. You want the materials to be accessible to the students and easy for them to put away when they are done. There is also the strong need to have everything in its own place. There is no set size for a classroom or the way that art is taught in the schools. Anne Bedrick states that “classroom arrangement is the unsung piece of curriculum” (Bedrick, 2012, p. 270).

Assessment of the artwork and whether the students are learning is another problem that arises. Administrations need to see that there is rigorous learning occurring in the classroom. The question of how you assess a choice-based classroom then arises. Many adults do not understand what goes on and how it is assessable. “Nan Hathaway once had to defend her choice-based program to a visitor who asked, “Can the kids just do anything they want?” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 32). This is when the teacher is able to show that the students learn at a high level when they need to do the problem solving, planning, and creating all on their own. Nan Hathaway in this case talked about how the students have higher expectations for themselves in her classroom.

The biggest issue had been the word *just*. Nan Hathaway would go on to explain that to someone from outside the classroom they wouldn't see the authentic learning the students are experiencing through their own development. The students are responsible for each step and documentation becomes a form of assessment for them. The beginning steps are not given to them. They must do all of the steps themselves. Formative assessments are ways that teachers are able to evaluate the student's skills and understanding. Students discussing their art, reflecting through written statements, and filling out a rubric self-evaluating their art are ways that they are able show their understanding of concepts. In an article written by Ian Sands he talks about assessing the process. In his classroom they created a self-assessment that covered artistic behaviors. This looked at more than just the finished product. The whole process was documented and they created mini blogs that they coined "snapshots". They created a list of artistic behaviors that the students needed to reference when creating their snapshots. These helped guide the students toward meaningful independent reflection. "The Artistic Behaviors they use are create original art, develop art-making skills, communicate through their work, take risks, collaborate, solve problems, and reflect". (Purtee & Sands, 2016, p. 28) Student response to choice based education has been best summarized by Anne Bedrick. She writes that "research on motivation and engagement establishes that students work harder and learn more when they are working on projects that interest them" (Bedrick, 2012, p. 135).

CHAPTER THREE

Methods, Participants, Instruments, Design, and Procedure

Method

The research for this study was conducted in the school classroom. Through this research I had a search to gain authentic responses from the students on what they preferred when it came to working with materials. Students all work in different ways and lean towards different tools to use. Having a rigid lesson hinders the amount that the students can explore and experiment on their own with materials. Through the choice lessons in the 8th grade I have started out slowly giving the students choices in materials, reference artists, and even project design. For the students they would have stations and boxes that they could get with their choice of materials inside of them. They did not have to compete to get a material. All the materials were set out each day for them and they were allowed to gather what they needed on their own. Review of artists all falling in the same art movement or time period was done early on in the lesson and then there were mini refreshers on the artists individually. When the students finished creating their work they reflected upon it and then filled out the questionnaires. These questionnaires are attached in the appendixes for further review.

The 7th grade students worked on their set project where they all used the same materials and created similar works of art. They also reflected upon their work and filled out a questionnaire. This questionnaire is also available in the appendixes.

Participants

The participants were randomly chosen from four eighth grade classes and four seventh grade classes. These students were a mix of both schools. Neither grade was made up of students from one school or another. The schools used are both within the same school district. Ellerbe middle school is the school further away from the main town of Rockingham in Richmond County. This is a school with on average two hundred students. Students traditionally come from farming families and included a diverse demographic. The school has smaller class sizes. The second school was Rohanen Middle School in a lower income area of the city of Rockingham. The school maintains populations around three hundred from year to year. Student class sizes at Rohanen reach larger sizes and top out at thirty.

Instruments

Data collection was done in two forms. The first form consisted of the creation of the work of art. When looking at the work of art I was looking for stronger craftsmanship, more time taken working on the project, and more creativity in the final product. This qualitative assessment measured the students' engagement through performance. As the students' teacher I was able to assess the differences between their levels of engagement more readily. Many of the students in the study I had taught in previous years. Since this was the first year of adding choice into the classroom setting I had background knowledge of the students and the way that they

worked. My past evaluations and grading of the students allowed me to look at how that student evolved on multiple levels. I had both the knowledge of the educator and the researcher.

The second form of data collection consisted of a questionnaire that each student filled out at the culmination of the project. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions that looked for the students' thoughts on choice. This quantitative assessment measured the students' reasoning behind the choices and their opinion on them.

Design

My study was a pilot study. The population was four eighth grade classes and four seventh grade classes. Each class averages twenty five to thirty students. The sample size included the work and questionnaires of twenty five students. Research was done through the collection of student art work and a questionnaire. Both collection methods were anonymous. Analysis of work was done by evaluating answers in the questionnaire and visual indicators in the student artwork. The visual indicators that I used were based on my prior knowledge of the students' work levels and the content of their work when finished. I used rubrics to look at how they tackled the elements of art, time management, workmanship, and standards that were being targeted. The analysis was looking for whether the students exhibited more engagement in the works they were creating and if their responses mirrored their work.

Procedure

Students were presented the lesson and the variety of choices regarding materials, themes, subjects, and influences on the first day of the lesson. The lesson then included an overview of how to use each material and where they can get the materials from. Students knew where to get the materials each day and were set on their own to work independently through the course of the project. They were given the choice of three reference artists to use for their project. Each student decided on his or her own theme, layouts, and materials. Some of the themes students chose included monuments, sports teams, animals, and other forms of nature. Some students chose to create abstract works as well. Each core project choice, outcome, was reviewed when the lesson was introduced. Students were encouraged to take notes and to try each method or style and to experiment with the materials before settling on what they wanted to create for their final work of art.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data, Analysis, and Results

Results

What Was Found Through the Research?

Through this study I gained insight about the ways that students want to learn. When using a traditional art education instructional mode, the first thing that I would always notice on a project overview would be the amount of grumbling and complaining about the material being used. When the 8th graders were presented with the choices and asked for their ideas about materials they became far more involved than the 7th grade students. I began to have students coming up with new ideas and asking to use materials even more outside the box than they were used to. Students in the 8th grade began to experiment with materials more and found what inspired them to want to create. When reading the questionnaires I noticed first that all the students preferred to have their choice in materials when it came to creating works of art.

I was fascinated by how much all the 8th graders preferred to work on a project and have ownership over how they created. When students were asked why they chose the materials they did, there were many that said it would make their work neater, or more colorful. They were looking for something to make their work stand out and make a statement. Many students also stated that they were looking for a challenge and wanted to try new things. Other students stated that they wanted to use materials that they knew and create in a way they felt comfortable.

When asked if they think that having a choice led to a more complete work of art they stated that yes it did. They were more engaged in the work and the process. For many they mentioned how they were able to use their imaginations more and made them work harder. There was a larger sense of ownership. They were creating as artists not students!

The following questions were covered in the graphs that follow. Question 6, did you prefer choosing the project style that you did? Why or why not? This question looked at the style and way they would create their work of art. The students looked at a variety of influential artists to choose from and then they explored their own ideas from there. This was a boundary choice project in the Montessori style of teaching. I worked on moving into choice with this project and showing the students the variety of options and influences that are at their disposal.

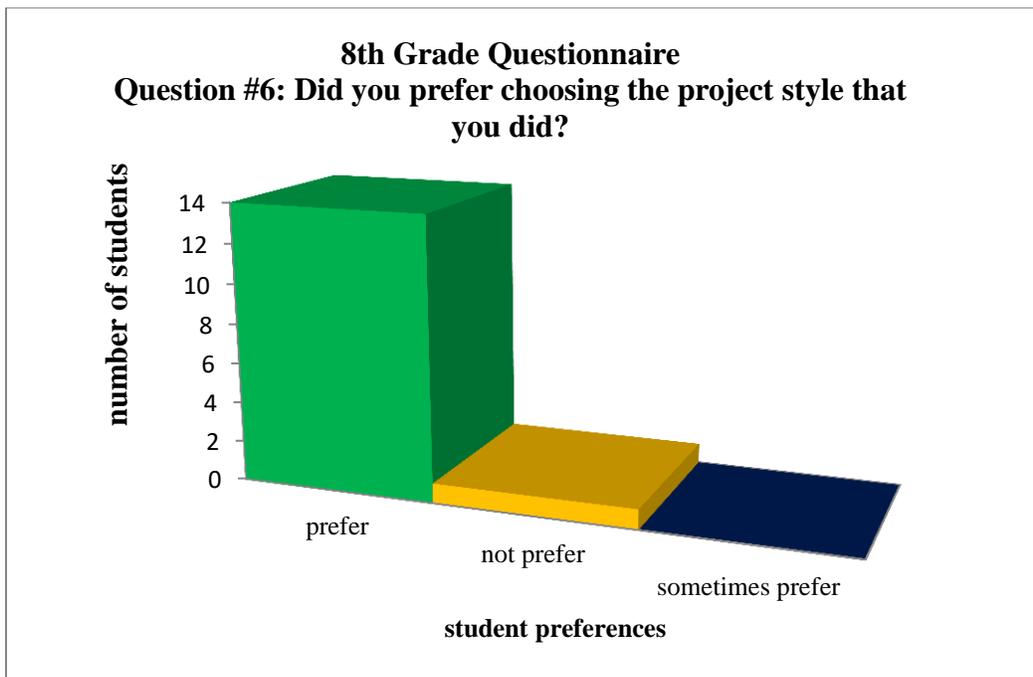


Table 1: 8th Grade Question #3

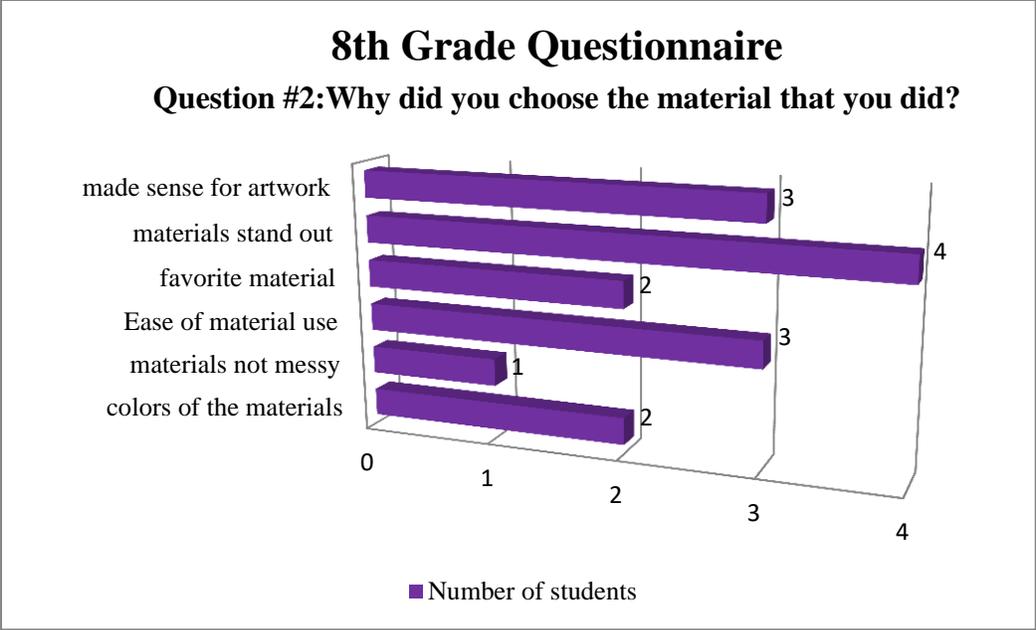


Table 2: 8th Grade Question #2

When looking at Question number two I was able to see why the students chose the material that they did. This was most interesting because of the range of reasons that were given. The largest number of students chose the material based on how it stood out. The final look of their work and aesthetics came into play for them. It was also telling to see that whether the material was messy did not come into play for the majority of the students. How the materials were able to be utilized and whether it made sense for their visions of the artwork were main reasons for the choices. Seeing the students choose different materials and in turn create different works than they normally would have was exciting.

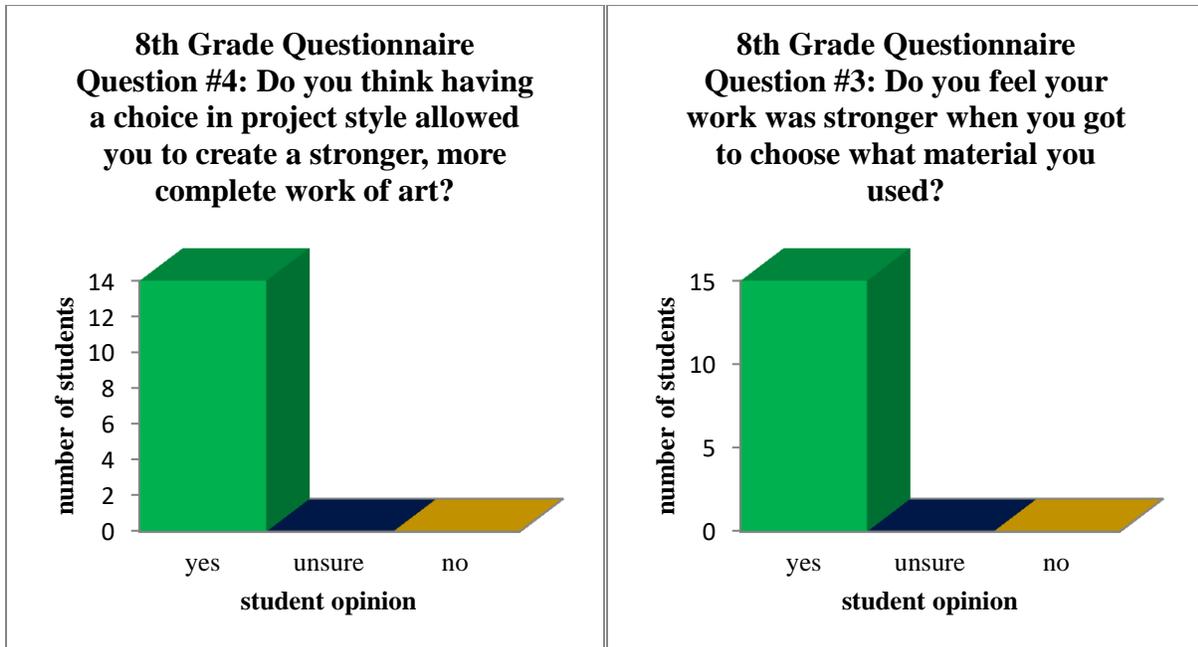


Table 3: Questions 3 and 4 of 8th Grade Questionnaire

In question 4 the students were asked, do you think having a choice in project style allowed you to create a stronger, more complete work of art? This question looks at whether the students prefer to have choice or options, depending on the level of choice in the overall lesson. Question 3 looked at the use of materials. Do you feel your work was stronger when you got to choose what material you used? This question let the students react to the changes they did or didn't see in their work. Having a choice in materials was an area that the students unanimously agreed on. Students were thrilled to be able to use what they were comfortable with. Gone was the mumbles about having to use a material they did not like, or were not comfortable using.

When 7th grade answered their questionnaires I received very different results. The students had mixed ideas about whether they wanted to have choice or not. They did not receive

choices of materials or direction for their projects. Some stated that they liked the material that they were given and that they were afraid that others materials might be too messy. There were other students though that did think that if they had had a choice they might have worked harder or been more motivated to finish the project strong. Many students though felt that if they had choices their confidence levels would be higher. They would feel more comfortable with the materials and the project. Students discussed what materials they would want to use and there was a wide range of selections made. In question number two the students were asked about if they would have preferred options. I found it interesting the results where many did not want to have options and then many did. I equate much of this to Choice being an unknown for them. I find it more interesting seeing how many answered that they wanted to use materials like clay and paint in the classroom. Neither of these materials were used for their projects during my study.

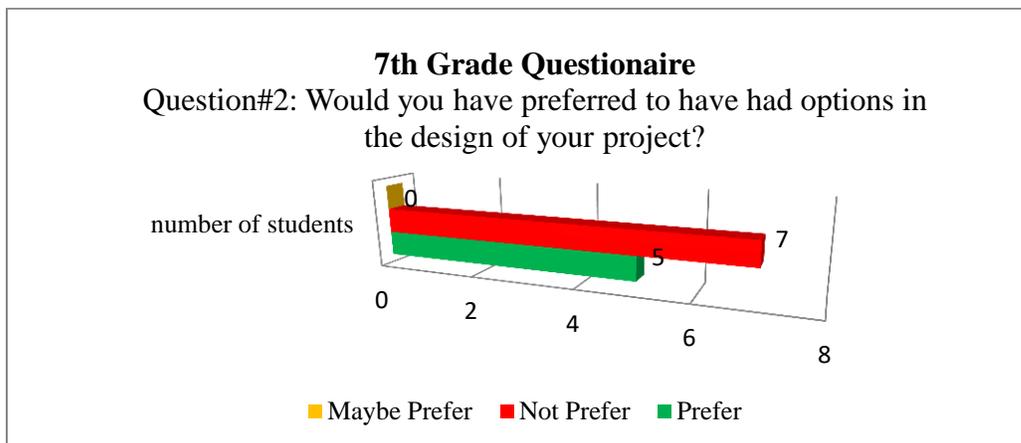


Table 4: 7th Grade Questionnaire Question #2

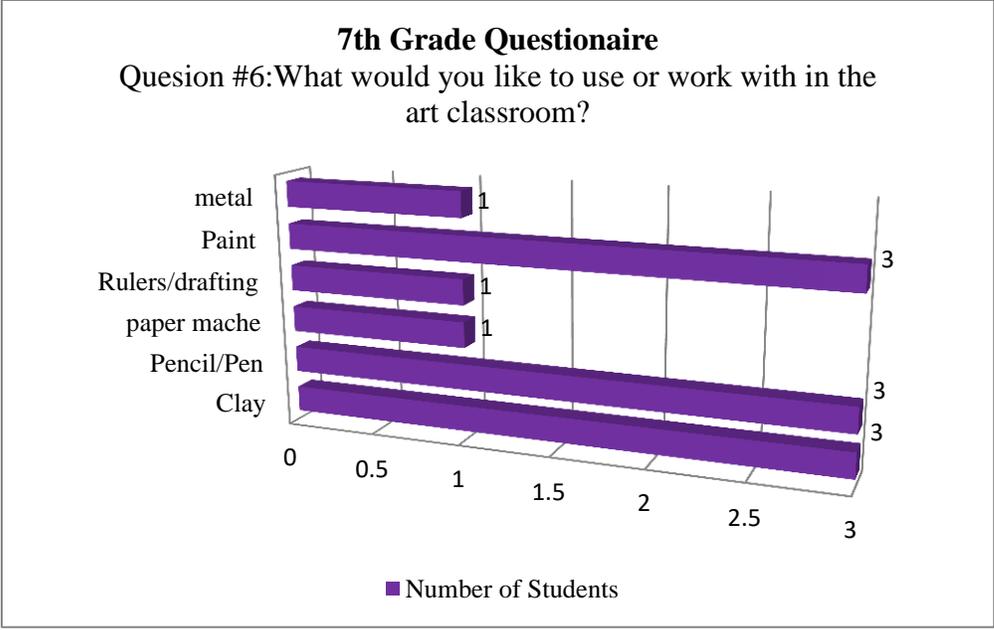


Table 5: 7th Grade Questionnaire Question #6

CHAPTER FIVE

Connections, Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

To summarize the answers to the first motivating question for this study “Does a choice-based art education curriculum allow students to re-engage by supplying them with the choice of creative means to fit their needs and comfort?, I found that the eighth grade students were eager to experiment with materials and definitely preferred to choose their own materials. They were enabled to re-engage in the creative process through the Choice-based instructional mode. Seventh grade students were less comfortable with the Choice-based process. Their reaction to the process is one that I would want to research further. I attribute the hesitation of the students to the fact that they have not experienced choice yet.

The other questions that were motivating the study, does the student create work that is stronger, more thought out, and have deeper connections when that student is given a variety of choices? What types of choices do the students respond to more? Do some students want to freely use materials and have a set theme for their work? The questions about materials brought about interesting results. The students first took to the idea of having their own choice in materials strongly. Each eighth grade class was excited for the opportunity to choose their materials, and use multiple materials in their works. Their enthusiasm in choice of material showed in the workmanship levels in their work. I was excited to see the work they were creating and hear their reasons for creating the work. There was also a strong reaction in the eighth grade

to what themes they would use in their work. The majority of the students wanted to choose their theme and had ideas already going through their mind.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through this research I have seen how choice is approached by students and where it can go. The data collected shows a strong need for continued choice in the classrooms. Students were receptive to the options that they were given and there were added benefits past seeing the higher levels of inquiry. Student behavior levels were much different. The students were engaged from the start of each class period. There was not a constant need for redirection and discipline. Students all made very different choices in materials. There would be students that worked in watercolors while others would work in pencil or colored pencil. The students gravitated to the materials that they enjoyed or new ones. Overall when using materials there was a large number of students that wanted to experiment with materials that they did not know like watercolors. The experimentation would not have been possible. When it came to the types of choices students really felt that choice of material helped them more. By giving them that choice they were more interested in coming to class. The thoughtful choice of materials was noted in the Choice classroom by Douglas and Jacquith. (2009) They elaborated on the need for the range of materials. Maria Montessori made sure that the materials were demonstrated and presented to the students where they were guided through how to use them and gave them examples. For each of the choice lessons in the classroom I provided demonstrations and techniques sheets for the students to go back to.

Having those students want to be there every day really changed the dynamics in the classroom. There was a motivation in the students that was noted as a result the students would see by Douglas and Jacquith. (2009) They talked about the need for the flexibility in lessons that would allow many students to create work that reflected their ideas and their personal abilities.

I felt that there was a much stronger level of engagement amongst the students when they were working on the choice based project. Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi were looking at this in their studies of middle school classrooms. (2005) They noted the decline in student interest and engagement. They had noted that schools had moved largely towards data and that the processes of teaching changed dramatically. In the classroom the students were able to be individuals and work out their own ideas and develop their own thoughts. I could see this working very well on a larger scale. An entire arts program can evolve around choice and student self-driven inquiry.

This can be daunting for a teacher though. There would need to be a large amount of preplanning and preparation in the classroom. In my classroom what I had to work on most was the organization first. I needed all of the supplies to be ready for the students. I organized materials into containers so that it was easier for them to take what they needed to their seats. For me I was worried about the organization levels for two classrooms. The daunting feeling I had was linked to making sure that both schools had the same opportunities through choice. I also had to realize that I would not have complete control over the classroom, and the direction of the work being done. Having an organized plan for the room and how the students work through the classroom throughout the day would need to be addressed by each teacher looking to work on a Choice classroom. As I looked at the data I could see how strongly the students felt that having choice was beneficial. The responses that they gave on their questionnaires showed that the

students really felt that they were creating works of art that mattered to them. It was also evident to me that the students were able to see the value in that choice once they were given it. The 7th grade students had not been exposed to choices and could not see the benefits. There was a lot of asking if they could do what 8th grade was doing.

Implications

I feel that choice in the classroom is a way to work on student engagement levels and allow for deeper thinking, expansion of thoughts and ideas, as well as strengthen student communication through their art and writing. These skills are ones that are valuable in a 21st century education. The creation of works of art that were a reflection of yourself has a greater draw than creating a work that everyone else in the room is. I for one enjoy creating work that is personal. Having something that everyone has or can create through a series of steps loses some of its creativity. There is no personality to a work that has 25 more on the wall done exactly the same. The ideas and the exploration are seen in a work that reflects one's self. I want to see ideas. There are many implications for choice in the art room. There are directions that still need to be explored and long term studies done.

There are still many unknowns about how choice will aid students in the long run. Thoughts are that with independent thinking the student will deepen their learning and their own likes and dislikes. This is an area that would need to be explored further and over a longer period of time. How does Choice effect the overall education of the student through their education? How does Choice aid the students as adults? What differences show up in adults of Choice

education and those of traditional? Will this make a noticeable change to the U-curve that looks at artistic development in the individual?

From the observations I have made through the study and day to day observations of my classes, I have found that the students created stronger work and made deeper connections to the content. With the independence in creation of the work the students have begun to gain real world skills as well. Watching the students put together a plan on their own and research without prompting was exciting. There were more questions about needing assistance with a problem and where they could look or research for ways to tackle it. The students wanted to see their work go further and accomplish it on their own. Their independence blossomed. Then there were the students that went to their peers for input. Collaboration began to occur throughout the room. How did you do that? What did you use to create that? Inquiries were being made and students were helping each other without the need of forced groups. Further studies could prove this true and that choice aids the students in becoming independent individuals.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Catherine Usewicz](#)

CC: [Cynthia Bickley-Green](#)

Date: 12/16/2016

Re: [UMCIRB 16-001884](#)
Boundary Choice Art in Middle School Classroom

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 12/16/2016 to 12/15/2017. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting

requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Art6898 task8-1UsewiczBic.docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Assent-Template-12-17-years-of-age usewicz.doc	Consent Forms
Choice based art Questionnaire 7th grade.docx	Surveys and Questionnaires
Choice based art Questionnaire 8th grade.docx	Surveys and Questionnaires
letter to parents usewicz 2016.doc	Consent Forms

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARENTS

East Carolina University



Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am presently working on my Master's in Art Education at East Carolina University. As part of my degree requirements, I am planning an educational research project to take place in my classroom that will help me to learn more about whether students are more engaged and complete more projects when they are given choices in materials and project outcomes. The fundamental goal of this research study is to show that students can become more engaged at this middle school level when there are new or different approaches to the learning.

As part of this research project in my classroom, your child will participate in various art projects where they will be given options for materials and 3-4 project variations over the next four to six weeks that will allow me to track their engagement and whether they liked having options in their learning. As this study is for educational research purposes only, the results of your child's participation **will not** affect your child's grade.

I am requesting permission from you to use your child's data in my research study. Please know that participation is entirely voluntary.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at school at 910-997-9839 or by emailing me at catherineusewicz@richmond.k12.nc.us. If you have questions about your child's rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the OHRI, at 252-744-1971.

If you permit your child's data to be used in my study, please return the attached form by **October 14, 2016**. Thank you for your interest in my educational research study.

Your Partner in Education,

Catherine Usewicz

As the parent or guardian of _____,

(write your student's name)

- I grant my permission for Ms. Catherine Usewicz to use my child's data in her educational research project regarding choice based art in middle school. I fully understand that my child's data will be kept completely confidential and will be used only for the purposes of Ms. Catherine Usewicz's research study. I also understand that I or my child may at anytime decide to withdraw my/our permission and that my child's grade will not be affected by withdrawing from the study.

- I do NOT grant my permission for Ms. Usewicz to use my child's data in her educational research project regarding choice based art in middle school.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C: ASSENT FORM

East Carolina University



Assent Form

Things You Should Know Before You Agree To Take Part in this Research

IRB Study # _____

Title of Study: Boundary Choice Art in Middle School

Person in charge of study: Catherine Usewicz

Where they work: Rohanen Middle School and Ellerbe Middle School

Study contact phone number: 910-997-9839

Study contact E-mail Address: catherineusewicz@richmond.k12.nc.us

People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to find out if students create more and complete more projects when they are supplied with choices.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research. You do not have to be in this research if you don't want to, even if your parent(s) has already given permission.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

Why are you doing this research study?

The reason for doing this research is to s

see if changing the way the art classroom functions will benefit students in their overall learning and middle school experience.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research because the results are most valuable when they are accurate and come from those in the middle school right now.

How many people will take part in this study?

A total of about 100 people at 2centers will take part in this study, including about 60 people from this center.

What will happen during this study?

- *Create projects as usual*
- *Fill out a questionnaire about the projects created*

This study will take place at Rohanen Middle School and Ellerbe Middle School and will last 4-6 weeks.

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?

The results will be shared with the University and staff members to help all learn from the results of the data.

What are the good things that might happen?

Sometimes good things happen to people who take part in research. These are called “benefits.” The benefits to you of being in this study may be more engaged in your work and produce more artwork.

What are the bad things that might happen?

Sometimes things we may not like happen to people in research studies. These things may even make them feel bad. These are called “risks.” This study has no known risks related to the data.

What if you or your parents don’t want you to be in this study?

If you or your parents don’t want you to be in this study, here are some other things that you may be able to create your artwork and not fill out the questionnaire at the end of the projects.

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

If you decide to take part in this research, you should sign your name below. It means that you agree to take part in this research study.

Sign your name here if you want to be in the study

Date

Print your name here if you want to be in the study

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent

Date

APPENDIX D: LESSON EXAMPLE

8th grade lesson Modern art work in the style of an Artist of choice

Lesson overview:

Students will create a work of art that focuses on the elements of art. They will have their choice of artist that we review to use as a reference as well as their choice in material to use. Paper size will vary as well depending on each student's ideas.

Standards:

I Can statement:

1. I can create a work of art that expresses my personal choice of materials and influential artist from modern art.
2. I can reflect on my personal work of art through a rubric and written statement.

Vocabulary:

Modern art

Self-expression

Watercolors

Abstract

Essential Questions:

What do you feel makes abstract or modern art interesting?

What influenced you when looking at the presentation?

Why do you think it did?

Why do we reflect on our own work?

Artists and References:

Sonia Delaunay

Piet Mondrian

Frank Stella

<https://prezi.com/ol3szexz3wyu/sonia-de-launay/>

Materials:

Colored pencils

Paper 8x11

Markers

Watercolor pencils

Sharpies

Pencils

Erasers

Paper 9x12

Paper 9x

Timeline grid by day:

Day and I can statements	Overview of the day
1. I can be introduced to modern art and plan my work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prezi• Notes on who/what drawn to• Brainstorming sheet• Overview of rubric
2. I can begin to layout my design on the rough paper and experiment with choice of material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of how to brainstorm• Thumbnail examples• References available• Plan• Experiment on a paper for in folder
3. I can create the under drawing for my design inspired by the modern artist of my choice and begin to add details with my choice in material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use rough plans to draw the under sketch• Define the drawing with pencil• Start to add materials
4. I can continue my created work of art and then reflect on my work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue with the addition of the materials• Add finishing touches• Start to add the materials
5. <i>Optional day if more time is needed throughout the project.</i>	<i>Any steps needed today that were not completed on earlier days.</i>

APPENDIX E: RUBRIC EXAMPLES

Rubric Examples

Name:

Point scale: A-4 B-3 C-2 D-1

Project:

Category	Points	Critique
Project Requirements		
Craftsmanship		
Time Planning		
Elements principles		

Name:

Project:

	Criteria				Points
	A-4	B-3	C-2	D-1	
Elements and Principles of Design	Planned Carefully, made sketches, and showed an advanced awareness of the elements of art. Went above and beyond requirements	The artwork shows that the student applied the elements of art and gave plenty of examples. Student met expectations.	The student completed the project adequately. Did not do any planning and showed only a few examples.	Assignment turned in, showed little evidence of understanding and did not have the elements arranged correctly.	
Craftsmanship And Neatness	All aspects of the artwork were considered and patiently completed.	With a little more effort in finishing techniques, the artwork could be outstanding.	The student showed average craftsmanship; but not at the student's previous abilities.	student showed below average craftsmanship. Did not take time and worked sloppy	
Time\ Management	Class time was used wisely. Student was self-motivated the whole class time seeking assistance only as needed.	Class time was used wisely. The student needed some refocusing but managed well.	Class time was not fully utilized. The student was sometimes distracted or off task.	Class time was not used wisely. Student was often asked to focus on the project.	
Execution Originality	The artwork was successfully executed from concept to completion with an original approach.	The artwork was successfully executed from concept to completion with some original aspects	The artwork was not successfully executed but with mostly examples given used in work	The artwork was begun, not completed. What was done was taken from samples or other student work.	
Project Requirements	All requirements are met and exceeded	All requirements are met.	1-2 requirements were not met completely.	Many requirements were not met.	
Grade you give →					
Final Grade →					

APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE 7TH GRADE

questionnaire for 7th grade

Choice based art Questionnaire 7th grade

1. Would you have preferred to use a different material for this project? If yes, then what material and why?
2. Would you have preferred to have had options in the design of your project? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel your work would be stronger with choices? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel that choice might help your confidence levels in your art?
5. What is your biggest struggle in art? What could help you with that struggle?
6. What would you like to use or work with this year in the art classroom? Why?

APPENDIX G: QUESTIONNAIRE 8TH GRADE
questionnaire for 8th grade

Choice based art Questionnaire 8th grade

1. Do you prefer to have a choice between materials or have the material used told to you?
2. Why did you choose the material that you did?
3. Do you feel your work was stronger when you got to choose what material you used?
4. Do you think having a choice in project style allowed you to create a stronger, more complete work of art?
5. Why did you choose the project style that you did?
6. Did you prefer choosing the project style that you did? Why or why not?

