

The Effects of Choice-Based Art Education on Student Engagement and Student Mood

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that Choice-Based Art Education (CBAE) increases student engagement and student mood. The study was conducted with fourth, fifth and sixth grade students in a traditional art classroom environment. I examined the way the class is run, the effects it had on student engagement, and the benefits to student mood. Engagement was measured in several different ways. Student participation and project completion were two of the ways that data was collected. The data indicated that student engagement is higher in a Choice-Based Art Education environment. This form of teaching art was created by elementary teachers Katherine Douglas and John Crowe in the 1970s. In the CBAE classroom, students are given the freedom to explore multiple media and to create their own projects. Students are more engaged and have a better mental status when leaving class. The data suggested that students took on more challenging art supplies and were more engaged and in better spirits by the end of class.

The Effects of Choice-Based Art Education on Student Engagement and Student Mood

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education in Art Education

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Choice-Based Art Education (CBAE) was developed in the 1970s by Kathryn Douglas and John Crowe as their own spin on the Montessori system of teaching art. In this form of teaching the “pedagogy is based on a three-part theoretical framework of what do artists do, the child is the artist, and the classroom is the child’s studio” (Matheson, 2019, p. 8). CBAE is a way of teaching art that allows students the freedom to choose what they want to create and how they want to create it. Sounds like chaos. It absolutely is, but joyous chaos.

“As students take responsibility for their art projects, they become personally invested in their education” (Andrews, 2005, p. 35). This became increasingly evident as my CBAE research progressed. The more choices provided, the more invested they became. Students who have more choices in what and how they create invest more deeply with their piece of art.

The purpose of this study is to examine if choice in materials and products increases student engagement and mood in the fourth- through sixth-grade art students. Students drop in their engagement levels when they reach a certain age. “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). Therefore, this research was conducted with nine- eleven-year-olds. In 20 years of teaching, I have seen a decrease in enthusiasm in the art room in these age ranges. Students would rush through projects and not do their best, despite my evaluative processes that should have been pushing them to do their best. More than that they did not feel artistic enough to tackle the projects at hand.

“Pushing them” is a phrase that does not work in the CBAE classroom. “Guiding them” is a much better way to look at it. This study set out to show that not only can students handle choice, but they also embrace it with passion and joy.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that was addressed with this research is a general lack of enthusiasm from students in the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classroom. So many art lessons out there for these age groups are all two-dimensional with the same supplies: colored pencil, crayon, watercolor paint, acrylic paint, markers, and tempera paint. Those supplies are great, but after a while, kids get burned out on them. I wanted to see what would happen if I provided students with access to everything we have in the classroom. I write a lot of grants for art supplies and have expanded our collection to about 52 different media that they can use. Some more sophisticated supplies are typically reserved for the middle school class to use. This is either because they have more time to do it, since they have art every day, or because it is a slightly more dangerous supply, like wood burning or stained glass. The thought process was that the CBAE model of teaching would pique their interest and improve effort and participation of the students involved.

The other issue I was addressing was to see if there was an increase in student mind-set or mood in this manner of teaching art. Typically, art class is a great way for students to calm down or vent their frustrations, but do they feel better when leaving the classroom? I want my room to be a place where they come and are excited to be there. I also want them to leave my room feeling emotionally better than they did when they arrived. According to Vandermolen (2023), this style of teaching “develops the emotional resilience your students need to face new challenges by pushing them outside their comfort zone one choice at a time” (p. 1).

Research Questions

My research questions were as follows: Does the Choice-Based Art Education process increase student engagement within the art classroom? This is important because in a traditional art classroom, the levels of engagement vary, and so does the quality of work. Most of my students participate, but are they enthusiastic about participating when it is a Discipline-Based or traditional Art Education assignment? CBAE is meant to create an environment that is more differentiated, therefore creating a more engaged environment.

The second research question was whether the CBAE process of teaching creates an environment that improves student mood. This is important because art class breaks up the day for most students. Having success throughout the school day is an important part of the learning process. Students doing CBAE see more challenges than they typically do in a DBAE or traditional program, but they also may have more success as they overcome those challenges. In a Choice-Based environment, students must make decisions about what to make, how to make it, and how long they will take to make it.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Basics of CBAE

Choice-Based Art Education was created as an art-specific adaptation to the Montessori way of teaching. This was created by Katherine Douglas and John Crowe in the 1970s (Dravenstadt, 2018, p.8). Both were elementary art teachers in Massachusetts. They were looking for an alternative to teacher-centered instruction.

Respect for children's capacity to make choices; recognition that they come to us with lives in progress, interest that drive them, questions that matter and faith that children recognize and respond well to the confidence we place in them inform this approach to teaching. (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 5)

The focus of this style of teaching was to emphasize the process over product. "The person making the decisions is the person who is learning" (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 8). Thereby, students increase their problem-solving and critical thinking skills through this creative process. CBAE is a way to give students multiple modes of learning, therefore reaching more learners than the "one way to do it" style of teaching. Choice-Based Art Education provides students with a studio environment and ownership of their choices on what to create and how to create it. According to Dravenstadt (2018) student engagement increased because students were more motivated to participate because they had more choice, they had a say in what they could create and having choices gave them more ownership of their work. Students get to make the decisions instead of being told directly what to do therefore it creates an environment where the student is in charge. This means a lot to the students as they invest more of their time and energy into projects they command.

In a CBAE classroom, students are given varying levels of choice depending on the teacher. "After taking this art class, I can easily see the differences between truly participating in

art and simply doing what one is told to create by the teacher,” (p.43) said a female student in Andrews’ (2010) study. In related research, Christensen (2024) found that students are more willing to take risks in their artwork without the fear of laxity. Pupils were liberated by having a choice in their creation process.

Usewicz (2017) says this way of teaching is also excellent for differentiating instruction. Another huge part of increasing student engagement is the ability to meet students where they are in their learning process. CBAE is an outstanding way to achieve this outcome. “In child-initiated activities, children were over twice as likely to try out ideas and to display more flexibility and originality, imagining, and hypothesizing and also significantly more likely to analyze ideas and to involve others” (Robson & Rowe, 2012, p. 358).

Differentiating instruction takes on a large variety of problems in a one-supply, one-result situation. When you open the studio up in a CBAE manner, it provides a unique opportunity to reach students of varying abilities. Usewicz (2017) says that differentiation is needed to provide students with the opportunity to create freely and challenge themselves. Students tend to choose harder supplies, ask more questions, and engage more deeply in the artmaking processes in this research.

Choices led to higher student engagement, increased student confidence, and meaning making within the art created (Dravenstadt, 2018). When students are allowed to choose what they wanted to make and what media they could make it with, they are more likely to do their best and complete the project with a greater sense of pride and ownership.

This environment provides a world of exploration and possibilities. It is an adjustment as a teacher to turn over control of what is being learned to the students, but it is a thrill to watch them 100% engaged in each class period. Messenbring (2021) stated, “Materials are arranged in

centers in the classroom, often labeled and arranged by media type, for example drawing, painting, ceramics, sculpture, and so forth” (p. 30). With this arrangement and choice, they are excited to arrive and hate to leave.

Douglas and Jaquith (2009), “Choice-based art education provides for the development of artistic behaviors by enabling students to discover what it means to be an artist through authentic creation of artwork” (p. 3). The classroom becomes their studio, and the student becomes an artist. They must learn where things are and how to clean things up and take pride in their work, and supplies. This begins the CBAE process and truly creates the environment of student-led learning. Linderman (2018) says, “I couldn’t think of a better way to foster independent thinking and creativity, promote artistic exploration, and allow students to interact with each other in an authentic, studio-rich environment” (p. 43). The process of CBAE inspires an environment of engaged excited learners and leaders. Students jump into the process with all they have.

Levels of CBAE

Corresponding with all my research before we can discuss levels, we must first look at the room arrangement. It is very important that there are stations within the classroom. Messenbring (2021) points out that materials should be arranged in stations so that all the supplies are manageable to find. They do not have to be big or perfect, but they need to exist, and the teacher needs to be consistent about where things are located. Organization is key to the success of this style of teaching. For example, the painting station should have what they need for painting in that area. In our studio, all paint is located around the sink in the cabinets above the sink. All our sculpture needs are located at the end of the room counter. Clay supplies are all located near the kiln door. Stations should be labeled for student clarity. For this study there were enough supplies to create a Stained Glass, Glass Fusing station, a clay station, sculpture,

drawing, painting, textiles, jewelry making station, enameling station in a locked closet, and several others. Anything hazardous is in a locked locker for each supply. The teacher must teach the students where everything is, how to use it, how to care for it and how to turn in their work. A turn in the station is a good idea too.

Conforming to Maronne's (2021) research, there are three levels of CBAE. Each level breaks down into three sub-categories. The first level is Limited Choice. The first breakdown of this consists of the teacher determining the topic, materials, techniques, and time spent on each project. The second one is Discipline-Based Art Education or DBAE. This is where the teacher provides limited choices. The third subcategory is called Creative Curriculum and is when the teacher provides limited choice in supply, project and time to create it. This is only done sporadically throughout a DBAE curriculum.

The second level of CBAE is called Moderate Choice (Maronne, 2021). This is where Project-Based Learning comes in. Students can work in groups to come up with creative solutions to problems and create more freedom within the restraints of the project's requirements. This is also where the Montessori style of teaching comes into play. Students have a wide variety of choices but still have constraints on technique and use of the supply and project directions. The last component of Moderate Choice is where the student has a limited amount of time, for example, 20% of class time, to work on a project of their own choosing with the supplies they want (Marrone, 2021).

Level Three is where my research fell and is called Abundant Choice. This consists of three subcategories as well. According to Marrone (2021), first, there is the Waldorf Reggio style. This is where the teacher prepares the environment for learners, but does not plan lessons with the specificity of a DBAE program. The second is here, the learner chooses what they want

to make and with what, but the teacher can set time limits or restraints on supply usage. The third is what I did. This is Teaching for Artistic Behavior, also recognized by Marrone (2021), where students have full choice of supplies, what they want to make, the way they make it, how long it takes, and what they learn from it. This form is totally student-led, with the teacher acting more like an assistant. The teacher may provide insight but is not in charge of what is being learned or how (Marrone, 2021). Each student may be learning a completely different supply and technique.

These levels can be taught in a multitude of different ways, but here are some examples. The first way is one where the teacher only has certain stations open on certain days and have that displayed in the room. So, students are limited to the open stations that day. Another way to do this is for teachers to provide one project but allow students to create that with the supply of choice. This can be done with a limited choice or an abundance of choices. For example, the fish project discussed earlier. Students' only requirements were that it was at least six inches long and is three-dimensional. Students were allowed to use any supplies to make it.

Another way to do this is to use a theme. Students learned about Native American artists and had to research that topic. Then they found a piece of art by the artist they chose and did their best to create something similar. Clay was the biggest choice on this project, but there were paintings, drawings, and Sculpey sculptures as well.

The last way to do this, that was used in this study, was to simply let the kids make what they wanted to make out of any supply they wanted to use. This was the one that saw the greatest improvement in student engagement. Students were required to go through a check-off process, discussed later, then use any supply they are checked off on.

Differences and Similarities to Traditional Art Class Instruction

The variances that appear in a CBAE classroom make it vastly different from conventional ways of teaching art. In the long-established teacher-led way, students are given very little choice and lots of instruction. For example, a class may be learning about drawing a farm using shapes. They are required to use very traditional shapes for things like barns and farm animals. They are shown an example, either teacher-created or internet-found, of what the final project should look like. Is this way of teaching beneficial? It has been taught that way for far too long to dispute its worth, but is it the best way? According to Lindeman (2018), “These curricula employed units structured around elements and principles of design and emphasized diverse exposure to material usage and techniques. As a result, students often produced formulaic projects with little individual choice or variation” (p. 65). However, this leaves little room for student creativity. When students have a single result, they try to achieve it, which stifles their passion and their critical thinking (Lindeman, 2018). This form of teaching may teach them how to draw the specific thing in the final product but leaves them with a blank in the creative process. This same project can be converted to CBAE simply by adding several different examples that they can reference and not copy and providing a choice in what they color it with. Go from just crayon to colored pencil, marker, crayon, or watercolor paint. This minor adjustment empowers the student to have ownership of their creative process. This is great to do with elementary classes like kindergarten through third-grade, so they learn where supplies are and how to use some of the basics.

Choice-Based Art Education, regardless of the level at which it is done, entrusts students to take ownership of their work.

In this orientation teachers often believe that art studio activities, by their nature, develop critical skills, that art studio activities are the most powerful for developing an understanding of art, and that the artistic process that is engaged when students make visual forms elicits and refines modes of thinking and feeling that are singularly important in education. (Eisner, 1984, p. 6)

CBAE alleviates the whining of students who may prefer one supply over another. It breaks up the boredom of using the same supplies for similar projects over time. The more choices supplied, the more passionate the students become. Is this overwhelming for some students? Yes, it is, but this is part of the differentiating process we discussed earlier. If a student is overwhelmed by the number of choices, then you simply cut them back to fewer choices with their input.

CBAE does not always avoid students choosing an easier solution. Some students will pick a medium that they think will be easy. You can limit this by only allowing students to use each supply a certain number of times. For example, they can only do two drawing assignments in a row. Or they can only use markers on two drawing assignments.

Benefits of CBAE on Engagement

According to Douglas and Jaquith (2009), “Intrinsic motivation drives students in choice-based classrooms to explore their personal interests and curiosities at their own pace, while their classmates engage in similar pursuits with the same or different media” (p. 8). This provides a more natural artistic experience while providing students with a studio experience. Intrinsic motivation is important in this classroom setting. This intrinsic motivation is a result of students wanting to do things and because those things matter (Lindeman, 2018). Since projects are

student-driven, this motivation is imperative. After implementing CBAE, Andrews (2010) noted that registration in her program doubled since students were more engaged with choice.

The research also showed students were willing to take risks in their projects without fear of failure. Christensen (2024) discussed that this process empowers the students' voice because it allows students to share their ideas and points of view. Students were curious about the more difficult supplies and driven to try media beyond the ordinary realm of supplies.

Benefits on Student Mood

According to the National Institute for Children's Health (2018), there are 34.8 million children between the ages of eight and seventeen who are exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs can impede their future and mental health. Since I have personally been through all the traumas on the ACEs scorecard, I was motivated to approach student mood in this research. Knowing this simply makes it much more important for students to have a safe place to express themselves freely. Per National Institute for Children's Health Quality (2018), the trauma kids experience "leads children to spend most of their lives in fight-or-flight mode, making it difficult for them to build healthy relationships, thrive at school or maintain future employment" (p. 1). Positive socialization comes in abundance in this CBAE style of teaching. Therefore, not only boosting their self-confidence through student and teacher feedback, but also their social skills through communication with peers. All of this boosts their mood.

According to Christenson (2024), boosting a child's mental status in an art class setting also builds their confidence and drive in other subjects and areas of life. In a world where "one in seven children (ages 10-19) have a mental health illness, it is important to build them up as much as possible" (Christenson, 2024, p. 10). Art class can be a place where students can vent their

frustrations through their artwork, so there is a unique opportunity to teach students to be empowered by their artwork.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study received IRB approval (See Appendix A) and was conducted in a Title One school where the children have a ton of home life issues. It is important to create an environment that not only are they excited to learn but that makes them feel good about themselves and their day. Of course, not every project is going to be a slam dunk, but every undertaking can have positive effects on the student.

For this research, after obtaining parental/guardian consent, students began to learn about the many media we have available in the classroom. Students needed to demonstrate an understanding of that media before moving on to a full project. They did this in an “Art Passport” where they demonstrated and got checked off on the media before using it. A Google presentation was shared with them with a slide for each media available to them in class. On the slides there are videos I created on how to use each media and what their passport page should look like. For example, with watercolor paint they demonstrate an understanding of wet on wet and wet on dry techniques as well as an awareness of how to blend colors. We did the first six media, for fourth- and fifth-grade, as a class, so they got used to the process. In the sixth-grade, we did the first 15 supplies with them doing them in order and at their own pace, with a check off after each one.

Once students had been checked off on the mandatory supplies, they then got to choose from the list which supply they wanted to do next. They did their passport checkoff for that supply then got a plan sheet. This plan sheet required them to sketch what they were going to make and list what supplies they needed. This was then signed off on and students began their work. As students completed one project, they moved on to their next one, therefore alleviating

the downtime students experience when everyone is expected to complete a project in a predetermined time frame.

In the Google slide presentation, each media had two slides, one with what they need to do in their passport and one slide with the examples and videos of projects using that media. Students brought their Chromebook to class every day and used that presentation to choose their media. Students were allowed to either use the projects provided in the slides or do one of their own choosing.

Student engagement was tracked using a class behavior monitoring app called Class Dojo. This allowed me to track if students were on or off task and track specific behaviors and accomplishments. For middle school their class participation grade came directly from this app, which calculates their average for you.

At the end of the study, students were interviewed, class dojo data was collected, student plan sheets were reviewed, and student work was shown off to the class as the artist felt compelled to do so. Student hard copy portfolios were returned to them at the end of the school year. All three-dimensional work was given back after grading unless it was kept for an art show.

Participants

Participants for this study were my fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. We are a Title One school in rural eastern North Carolina. There were 62 participating students. Fourth- and fifth-grade classes consisted of 25 students each. The sixth-grade class had 12 students in it. All three classes were comprised of students in the nine- through twelve-year-old age range depending on their grade level. Students were current art students therefore they were not pulled from another class for this study. Students in fourth- and fifth-grade came to art once a week. Students in sixth-grade came every day of the semester.

Instruments

The data collected for this study was done in several forms. Students' plan sheets (see Appendix B), daily mood assessments (see Appendix E), and Class Dojo data was recorded. Their final project was also taken into consideration in assessing their success.

Using Class Dojo, I was able to assess their engagement and productivity rates. Students were given a total of six points during a class period. Points were awarded for being on task, completing a project (two points) and completing their grade rubric. Points were awarded for being on task, completing a project and check offs on supplies. Points were taken for being off task. The Dojo point system provides clear data on the student's engagement level, which is then scored in the Dojo program. Scores can be ascertained by the day, week, or month. I did weekly participation grades for middle school students. Elementary class points were awarded the same way and averages were used for data for this research.

The plan sheets (see Appendix B) were used to assess if the student had thought through the creation process as much as possible before beginning the creation process. Students were required to draw an example of what they were making (even if it was not something they were going to draw in the creation process). Students were required to make a supply list to be sure they understood how to use the supply beyond what was checked off in their passports. Students were required to track how many days the project took them to build time management awareness.

Students were to assess their mood at the beginning and end of class. This was done by looking at a slide on the presentation on the smartboard. The slide had a scale of one-six, one being happy and six being totally frustrated (See Appendix E). Students scored first thing after

entering the room and last thing before leaving the room. This was tracked in their digital portfolios.

Procedures

Once the Art Passports were ready, students came into class ready to work. They did their mood assessment first thing. Then plan sheets and passports were distributed by a student. Next, they were released by table to go get their supplies. They were to work on their passport or the project they had planned for.

Students lined up at my podium to get passports and plans checked off. Once they had approval then they could work on that project until the end of class. At the end of class, students stopped five to seven min early, depending on the supplies being used; clay takes more time to clean up. When they clean up, they are to clean up everything they use and got out. The classroom should be clean and ready for the next group. Artwork was stored on the counters or drying rack for wet paintings. Dry work was stored in their folder portfolio. All three-dimensional work was stored on the back counter with “Do Not Touch” signs on them. After students cleaned up, they did their final mood check in their digital journals and waited to be lined up by table.

Students' work was kept in their folder portfolio until the end of the marking period. Then they were allowed to take it home. Work was displayed in the hallway on bulletin boards, used in art contests, and shown in the art show at Emerge Gallery for the Pitt County Schools student art show.

Procedures for completing a project were as follows: students completed their passport page and got checked off, then they filled out a plan sheet and got it approved, next they worked on their project until it was completed. After they created their project, they graded their work

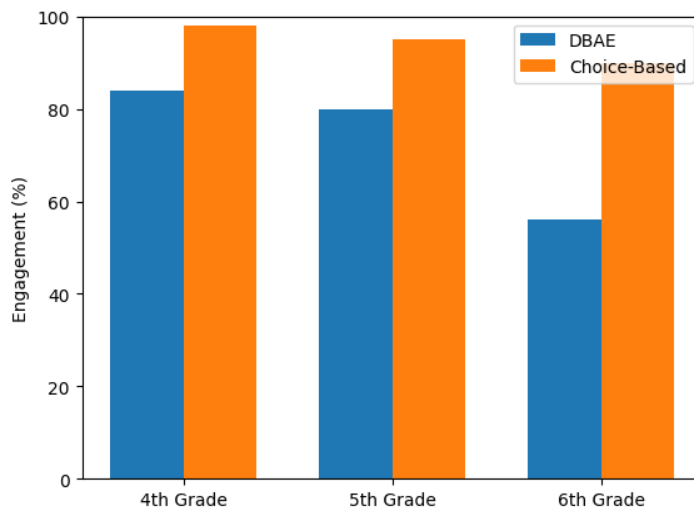
with the project rubric on the plan sheet and submitted their work in a digital portfolio created in Google Slides.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Through this study, I learned so much about my students. As their art teacher from kindergarten to eighth-grade, I get a unique opportunity to learn about them and see them grow. With this study I got to know them in a whole new way. Students didn't just come to class and perform some expected tasks. They came to class ready to take on the world. They were more enthusiastic and more willing to take on challenges than I ever thought they would be. Students were energized by the choices they had and the experiences they were about to embark on. Typically, when kids arrive to class there is a few minutes of time when they are off task. Students being off task ended with CBAE. Students arrived and eagerly got their supplies when they called on and instantly got to work. This was a distinct growth in effort and engagement.

Table 1

Increase in Engagement from Traditional Teaching (DBAE) to CBAE



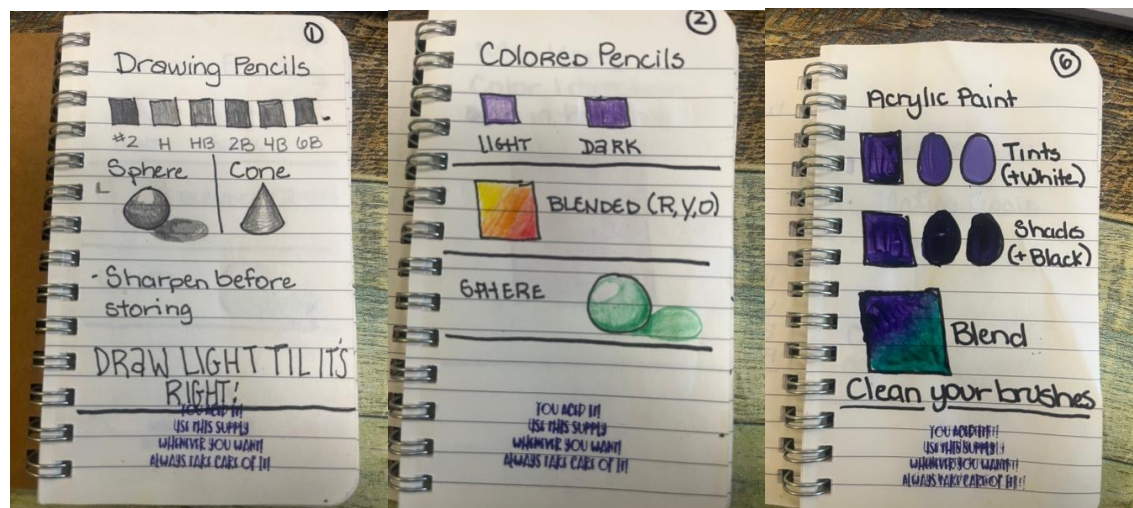
As you can see from the data (see Table 1), student engagement increased a lot especially for the class of sixth-graders. Student engagement was not an issue before for me (except in sixth-grade), but student passion in that engagement was lacking. I wanted to see students super

excited about learning art. I wanted to see them engaged with enthusiasm. I wanted to see them come to class thrilled about what they were doing. CBAE was the way to accomplish that. According to a female student in Andrews' (2010) research, "In other art courses you do what the teacher wants and what they plan. In this class you have to think" (p. 1). Having to think was a defining characteristic in this way of teaching art and was the goal I was trying to achieve. The freedom that came with them getting to do what they wanted with supplies was overwhelming. Students had to sketch their design and get that checked off along with a supply list, so it would be evident that they had thought all the way through the process. Getting the students to put a reasonable amount of effort into their sketches was a bit tough but once they got that done, they were all gung-ho about doing the work. Problem-solving became an inherent part of the creation process.

My students were eager to get their passports done. They watched the videos for how to use each supply they were required to check off and then proceeded to do the entries for new supplies that they wanted to try. They completed one page per supply. See Figure 1 for an example of what their pages looked like after completion. They drew this information in their own passports and then did what was instructed in the video.

Figure 1

Passport page 1, Passport page 2, and Passport page 5



It was not long into this process when they were granted the power to choose their supplies and subject matter. Even a limited choice brings a sense of ownership to the student who needs a boost. Overcoming the challenge of a new supply provides a deep sense of accomplishment. Students were rated on a simple one through six scale of how they felt when they arrived at class and then again at the end of class. This was tracked in their journals daily. Not only did it go up during each class, but it got progressively better each day throughout the week. Once students got the hang of the procedures and the process, their check-in scores grew from anxious to happy at the beginning of class as well. Students were pulled and interviewed to be sure that the class had something to do with that self-assessment. This was done in all three grade levels. Students reported a stronger sense of accomplishment and pride in their work as well as a general sense of self-worth.

Students took on even the most tedious art forms. For example, a fifth-grade student decided to learn about paper quilling. She researched the art form. She got the kit from our supplies, did the check off, which was quilling a few small leaves and flowers, and proceeded

with the slow process of creating her design. Though she did not get to finish it before the school year was over, she spent weeks on that project with no complaints, no hesitation, and with total enthusiasm. She was one of the many students who had similar results.

My fifth-grade boys really got into needle felting. They created video game characters and animals, as seen in Figures 2 through 5, I had to limit them to two projects with this material because it was all they wanted to do.

Figure 2

Needle Felted Chicken



Figure 3

Needle Felted Video Game Character



Figure 4

Needle Felted Duck



Figure 5

Needle Felted Gnome

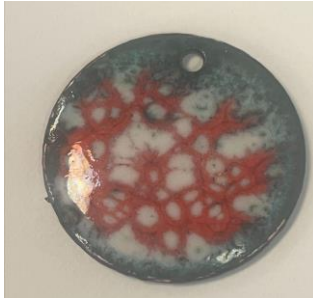


Enameling was also a big hit. This one took a lot more monitoring and therefore I used proximity to be sure they were handling the supplies safely. Students then drew what they wanted to make. They were encouraged to create a non-objective piece (see Figure 6) as it is difficult to make actual pictures on them without a lot of practice, and we did not have the supplies for them to do many pieces. I did all the firing with them watching. Even students who

did not do this artform learned about how to do it from seeing it done by their peers. This is not an art form done in many public schools, so it was cool to expose them to something different.

Figure 6

Enameled Pendant



Another student did stained glass. This involved the entire process, finding a pattern, cutting the glass, grinding the glass, adding flux, copper taping each piece, and soldering the pieces together (see Figure 7). There were also students who took on glass fusing. They made very basic abstract pendants, as seen in Figure 8.

Figure 7

Stained Glass Sun



Figure 8

Glass Fused Pendant



In one of the classes, students were hesitant to push themselves beyond the stereotypical supplies. When the CBAE process was introduced to this group, they began grumbling about having to do their passport until they understood every supply they were checked off on was a supply they could use on any project from that point forward. Students who did not see themselves as artistic got through their mandatory checkoffs and then went for the harder media. I instantly noticed an entire change in attitude toward the class. They liked it before, but now they were enthusiastic about creating art. There is a greater sense of pride in their work. They were more willing to research, another critical thinking skill, so that they could see examples and gain ideas of what to make with the various media. Students would get to class and come charging in the door to get supplies and get to work. This meant zero lag time and total chaos for the first five minutes. We reeled in that discord with procedures for getting supplies. It was not only motivating for the students but sparked a greater passion for teaching in me.

There were many different supplies that students took on using. Here are some of their best works. Sculpey was used to create a self-portrait, seen in Figure 9, by a sixth-grade student. A fourth-grade student did the wood carving in Figure 10. A clay pinch pot monster (see Figure 11) was made and glazed at by a fifth-grade student. Some students created pottery on the wheel

in all three grade levels, as shown in Figure 12. Printmaking with Styrofoam was another option that students took to (see Figure 13).

Figure 9

Sculpey Self Portrait



Figure 10

Deer Wood Carving with a Dremmel



Figure 11

Clay Monster Pot



Figure 12

Students Working on the Pottery Wheels



Figure 13

Styrofoam Print



Before beginning, students answered a Google form about how they see themselves as artists and what they know about the current supplies in the classroom. They were provided with the list of supplies (See Appendix F), so they knew what we had to base their judgment on personal knowledge. They retok this quiz at the end of the semester on paper. Students show marked growth in their self-perceived worth as an artist on a scale of one to ten. This was based

on their perceived perspective on what a good student artist is. The growth from before we started CBAE to after we started CBAE is amazing (see Table 2).

Table 2

Growth in artistic confidence

4th Grade:

Traditional 38% → 73% CBAE.

Growth: +35%

5th Grade:

Traditional 45% → 83% CBAE.

Growth: +38%

6th Grade:

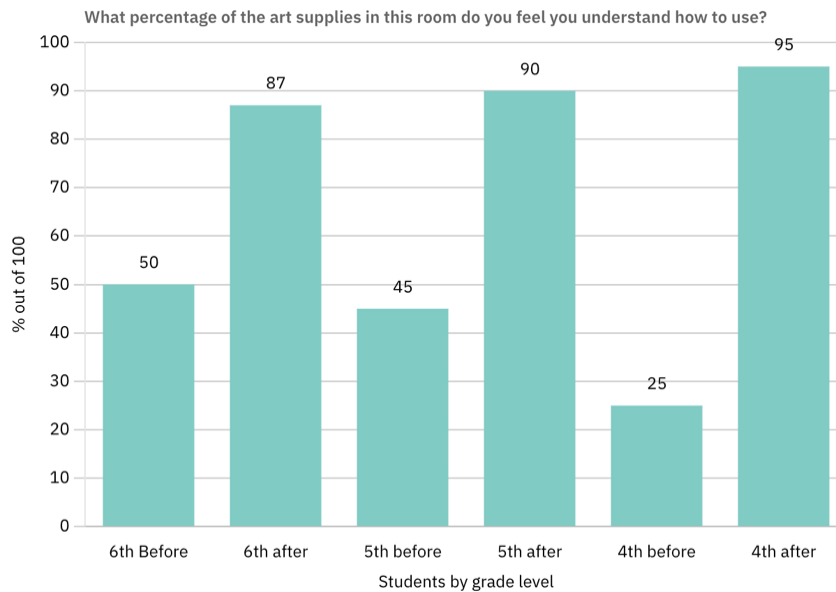
Traditional 34% → 84% CBAE.

Growth: +50%

The next question they were asked is where do they see themselves in their knowledge of how to use the supplies in the classroom? As seen in Table 3, there was a large growth in their knowledge. When interviewed and asked why they felt this growth had occurred, they all said that because they got to use many different media, and because they saw others using media, they didn't they felt their knowledge had grown exponentially. This increase directly affects their sense of self-worth as an artist and therefore has a direct impact on their mood.

Table 3

Increase in student supply knowledge



At the end of the research, students were asked if the CBAE way of teaching had improved their engagement in their work. All but two students said they saw a huge growth in their engagement and motivation. This also tracks with the Class Dojo data that showed a leap from 85% engaged to 98% engaged over the three classes.

Students were asked if they believed that there was a difference in their mood due to this form of artwork. Eighty-six percent of students reported feeling better at the end of the art class compared to 70% before this study. They reported that the environment felt more acceptable and that they were free to express themselves more freely. They reported the class had become more like a community since they were all constantly helping one another out with projects and materials.

The final question they were asked after this research was if CBAE had increased their effort on their artwork. So not only are they engaged but they are putting forth more effort to do the projects well. All but the same two students said they believed there was a huge increase in their effort. A staggering 96% of students reported growth in their level of effort.

I do believe that some of my data may be skewed by the fact that my students were already enjoying the class even when taught in the DBAE style of teaching. I had already created a safe environment for them to express themselves without judgment from me so in giving this quiz at the beginning, I asked them not to consider those factors. I think this caused them to score low on the initial quiz. I also believe that because students already feel safe in the classroom, students I expected to take on easy projects took on much harder projects and put forth more effort than they had with projects in the past.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This research was most beneficial in getting to know my students' artistic interests. My fourth graders were much more interested in creating three-dimensional art than anything two-dimensional. Though I did find getting them to put things away completely was a very tedious task. They consistently left out Dremel bits and needle felting needles. This posed a problem as I teach lower grades that do not need access to those things. For this reason, I have not turned that group loose on the supplies just yet this year. Knowing their interests and being able to monitor everyone made this a challenging way of teaching. I thoroughly enjoyed the exuberance it brought to the classroom but needed to work out some of the trouble spots with the fourth- and fifth-grade groups. However, I am doing it again this year with my middle school classes.

Another aspect I was curious about with this research was whether this pedagogy would allow for a higher quality of work. Linderman (2018) discussed how the teacher he observed had the students sit quietly for the first 5 or so minutes of class for a demonstration on how to use a particular supply. In their observation, they discovered this time was difficult for students. I alleviated that difficulty by creating a series of videos for each supply. Students struggled with this part, but not in a disruptive way. They did try to skip the video, but that was obvious in their passport entries and was rectified by redirecting them to watch the video to get it correct. Once that took place the students would spend weeks on assignments, getting every detail right. They received constructive criticism and wanted to know how to improve their work. They produced higher-quality work effort and determination that they had in previous works of art in the traditional format.

My last research question was whether CBAE increases student mood. Were students happier at the end of class, after doing CBAE, than they were before coming into class? Did it

overall benefit their mental health and well-being? Christenson (2024) found that students' involvement in the arts "positively predicts adaptive motivation, academic buoyancy, academic intentions, school enjoyment, class participation, self-esteem, meaning and purpose, and life satisfaction" (p. 16). I also wanted to know if the sense of pride that came from accomplishing new and exciting projects made them beam with pride. It did. Students were overjoyed with their accomplishments. CBAE enhanced their moods and most always checked out of the class with one or a two on our mood scale.

I saw much more collaboration and proactive thinking than I had before. Students were not only invested in their work, but they also invested in the work of their peers and were constantly willing to help. The lack of time constraints gave them the freedom to stop their project long enough to help someone else with theirs. Collaboration also helped raise their spirits. They formed their own learning teams based solely on the project they were doing rather than their friend groups. Kids who rarely talk were helping one another. This follows the results of the research done by others in this field (Christenson, 2024).

Mathison (2019) mentioned that a commonly cited argument against CBAE is the increased cost. In the current state of the nation and budget cuts that have gone up every year, there is no money to give teachers any supplies. In Pitt County, there are grant opportunities, and if written well and reasonably priced, you can get them. [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org) is also another great way to get crowd-sourced funding for specific projects. For example, watercolor paint is popular, and the cheap stuff sticks together. A grant was written to get 25 nice sets that last longer and don't stick together. Supplies like that are not available for the traditional school budget. Last year, for the spring semester, I wrote over \$2,400.00 in grants. So, though this is a truly engaging way to teach it is certainly not a cheap way to teach. I don't think a regular CBAE classroom has

as many stations as I do. So, it can be done far more cheaply than what I did. I do believe the strong results I got for increased engagement are directly related to the abundance of choice I have available in my classroom.

Another issue with the CBAE classroom environment is that if administrators do not know what is going on, then it can appear like chaos. Applying standards to these lessons is not difficult, but making it look neat, clean, and everyone's doing exactly what they should be doing is very difficult. Luckily for the students in this study the administrator understood what she would be observing.

In a classroom setting such as this, it is also critical that you allow time for students to clean up. In the process of doing this I learned that if there is clay out then at least 7 minutes is needed to clean it all up. There is no time between classes, so it is imperative that the room is clean and ready for the next class. Also teaching them how to take care of the supplies falls into this time as well. Students must know all the ins and outs of cleaning up. For example, cleaning up paintbrushes does not mean throwing them in the sink. Nor does it mean cleaning them and then putting them bristles down in a cup. This is something that the teacher must stay on top of for students not to create bad habits, so it means checking everything at the end of each class.

Students felt they had a voice in what they were doing and were consequently more infused with motivation to do well on each project. Students were genuinely honest when scoring their projects and took a great sense of pride in doing so. I would say 90% of the time I gave them the grade they gave themselves or higher.

I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that these three classes did more artwork in a wider variety of media than any of my past classes of the same grade levels. The discipline issues decreased, and effort skyrocketed. Just one of my sixth-grade students did work in 15 different

media, none of which were the traditional colored pencil, crayon, marker, acrylic paint, oil pastels or chalk that are so often used in the art room. She learned how to write her name in Kanji with a bamboo pen, how to do suminagashi, how to airbrush, make a coil pot, do wood burning, use watercolor pens, do wax batiking, enameling, beados, sculpt with Sculpey, glaze her pottery, do printmaking with foam and cardboard and build with popsicle sticks. This is on top of the first 15 things they had to get checked off. This is just one student example of how they challenged themselves.

One thing I really liked about the way I did this is that their passports are good through eighth-grade, so they do not have to start over each year. I have already started this approach again this year with my students and they are excited to have their passports returned to them and to be able to begin this year with the choice to choose what they want to use from the start. We had a few new students this year, and they have also jumped right into getting their passports up to date so that they too can choose what they want to create with.

In conclusion, Choice-Based Art Education increases student engagement through the students having choice and voice in their work. It improves student effort by increasing their inspiration and creativity. Lastly, it improves their mood by showing them they can do hard things, giving them a say in what they do, and creating an environment of positive feedback. CBAE also creates a studio of collaboration and communication. Students work together to help each other become successful in all they do. I was totally blown away by the number of students who would stop their own project to learn about someone else's project. I am now doing this system with my sixth- through eighth-grade students and having tremendous success.

Implications

This research has confirmed many of the findings from professionals in the field of art education who have implemented CBAE in their classrooms. CBAE improves student investment in their artwork and therefore increases engagement. Students take pride and ownership of the works they create. Detractors claim that CBAE does not provide the opportunity for students to produce the more polished artwork that traditional approaches to art education produce. I found that, more often than not, students produce works that are more polished than what they typically do. Students who were “rush its” when I was using a traditional style of art teaching often took their time to complete their works of art, striving to make them quality pieces.

Doing this, however, requires administrative support for both the teacher and the budget. Without a supportive administration I am not sure how one could succeed in a CBAE classroom. It does create a sense of chaos, and if someone does not support it, there could be the appearance of poor classroom management. I did not have any financial support from my administration other than being allowed to write as many grants as I could. Administrative support through class size reduction is also very helpful. I had both large and small classes and can say, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the smaller classes were easier to manage, and it did not feel as overwhelming with the smaller groups.

CBAE also improves students’ Social Emotional Learning in that it provides them with another avenue to express themselves. It fosters autonomy and confidence while providing a safe place to express themselves. This safe space is critical to this process. Students must feel they are able to tackle whatever emotional issue they may be facing in their own space within the confines of the classroom. As a teacher, making sure you have created a space that they are free to succeed or fail and try again is a huge part of this process. This means not only managing the

supplies well, but you must nurture an environment in which the comments from peers are supportive in nature. The student data collected from the mood tracking instrument demonstrated that this classroom environment is a positive one.

Students are free to create in a studio-based atmosphere where they learn how to make mistakes and fix them. This enhances their problem solving and critical thinking skills, not just in the realm of art, but it also builds their brain power for their core classes. This process-over-product mindset allows students to work through the ins and outs of the creative process without the fear of being admonished for failures. This study not only provides a rich description of a CBAE teaching environment but also provides evidence that CBAE increases student engagement and improves the students' mood.

Future Research

More research needs to be conducted in younger elementary classes to evaluate the efficacy of this approach to teaching. Doing this on a smaller scale for lower grades would be most productive. Younger grades, such as Kindergarten, require more supervision and direction than the students in this study, therefore it would have to be done differently. The level to which it would need to be done differently depends on the grade level of the students being studied.

Longitudinal studies of the benefits of CBAE throughout the K-12 grade levels would be highly advantageous as this is a newer area of research and has mostly been done with shorter-term studies. It would be interesting to discern whether, for example, CBAE develops greater levels of creativity as students are involved in it over multiple years. It would also be advantageous to study how CBAE affects the college course choices that a student makes.

In future research, I would also suggest that the study be done with a much more limited number of supplies than what I offered. Some students became overwhelmed by the number of

choices and struggled to decide what to make. I have since created a second slide presentation with links to videos with some projects for students who truly struggle with coming up with their own ideas. They are not allowed to do many of these, as they are more guided projects, but it has proven to be helpful getting them back into the flow when needed.

Researching this way of teaching with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) would also be beneficial. Teachers want to grow students' daily life skills, and navigating the increased use of AI is going to be an important part of that. Teaching students how to use AI without relying on it to provide the creative component of their work is going to be the tricky part. Students have already learned the benefits of AI and use it in ways that are both productive and unproductive. Seeing this become an integral component of their artwork without stifling the stimulating artistic process provided by CBAE would need to be the goal of this potential future research.

It may also be useful to study how the autonomy provided through CBAE affects students in their long-term endeavors in other academic areas. Does this way of teaching art make students more willing to take risks in their schoolwork or job life? Does it foster resilience? Since CBAE builds a stronger sense of community within the art room, it would be interesting to study whether this way of teaching creates people who are more comfortable working in teams.

Finally, future research in the potential areas where CBAE and differentiated instruction overlap may be interesting to develop strategies where the classroom meets the needs of all students. Exploration into the ways that CBAE achieves differentiated instruction could yield findings that would benefit other areas of academic study, as well. In this study, I perceived that students with ADHD benefitted from CBAE as they could work on more than one project at a time. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which CBAE minimizes wasted time

that inevitably comes when students, particularly those with ADHD, become frustrated with more difficult and time-intensive projects.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

I believe I achieved what I set out to accomplish with this research. When looking at the effects of Choice-Based Art Education on student engagement, I did indeed find that it increased student engagement. Students were thrilled to come to class and learn a new non-traditional supply and transform their own ideas and thoughts into a piece of art. Students were fully in charge of the creative process unlike in traditional teaching. Students had to think through the planning phase of art creation and got to experience the trial-and-error part of being an artist that is left out in a traditional classroom.

Students began this process somewhat engaged but not as committed as I wanted. Getting through the required passport pages took longer than I planned but proved to be beneficial in the long run. If I had it to do over again, I would do the first five pages as a class and then let them continue on their own just to be sure they understand the process better before throwing them into it. I also believe I would add a sketchbook for them to sketch their projects in after getting checked off on their supply. I am doing it this year as well and have changed those things and find it is running much smoother.

When given the choice that this process allows students were far more excited to learn. They found themselves immersed in the experience of creating art and not solely obsessed with the end result. This elevation of engagement was riveting to experience. Students were inquisitive and enthusiastic about everything they took on. Not to say they did not get frustrated at any point but the level of exertion they put into ascertaining their goals was far more than I had ever witnessed in a traditional classroom. I wanted them to be passionate about their works of art and to feel a sense of accomplishment in what they achieved. This process completely accomplished that.

I believe one of the things accomplished in this style of teaching is student exposure to a much larger number of supplies than they would typically see in a more traditional art room. The supplies used the most were cardboard, clay, watercolor paint, glass, wood carving with Dremel tools, wood burning, and needle felting. Those were the most popular supplies but by far not the only ones used. This process opened up the window for students to truly explore what they are interested in. I found myself captivated at the quality of work increase seen in students' projects. Students produced much higher caliber works than I saw in the previous traditional way of teaching art because they were more invested in their work since they had control over the entire process.

I will say I know that there are teachers who do this all the way down to Kindergarten, but I cannot imagine doing this in an unlimited choice manner with my younger classes. I will provide more choices in the future to Kindergarten through second-graders, just not full choice, at least not yet. I believe my third-graders could handle choices, as well, but again, not to the extent of the fourth- through sixth-graders.

If asked if I would do this differently, I can say yes. I am working out those kinks now and building up to free choice with the same students from last year. I would probably create a set number of stations with far fewer choices for my elementary classes to avoid overwhelming the students. So instead of having dozens of choices each day, they would have maybe six, and those would rotate out during the year. Therefore, they would still get exposure to a lot of different media but there would not be the confusion over where to start and what to take on. I would also do a daily demonstration of different media that I know they don't know about to pique their interest.

After doing this study, I believe that providing choices for students created a more positive learning environment. Students were more engaged and put forth more effort in this style of classroom. Per a female student in Andrews' (2010) study "After taking this art class, I can easily see the differences between truly participating in art and simply doing what one is told to create by the teacher" (p. 1). I believe this statement says it all. We want our students to be active learners and creative thinkers, and I firmly believe that this is a fantastic way to contribute to their success in life.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
Willis Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284**
rede.ecu.edu/umcirm/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [MaLisa Jessie](#)
CC: [Robert Quinn](#)
Date: 3/4/2025
Re: [UMCIRB 24-002238](#)
Benefits of Choice-Based Art Education

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 3/4/2025. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6,7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

As the Principal Investigator you are explicitly responsible for the conduct of all aspects of this study and must adhere to all reporting requirements for the study. Your responsibilities include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring changes to the approved research (including the UMCIRB approved consent document) are initiated only after UMCIRB review and approval except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of participants, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the UMCIRB before they are implemented;
2. Where informed consent has not been waived by the UMCIRB, ensuring that only valid versions of the UMCIRB approved, date-stamped informed consent document(s) are used for obtaining informed consent (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the ePIRATE study workspace);
3. Promptly reporting to the UMCIRB all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others;
4. Submission of a final report application to the UMCIRB prior to the expected end date provided in the IRB application in order to document human research activity has ended and to provide a timepoint in which to base document retention; and
5. Submission of an amendment to extend the expected end date if the study is not expected to be completed by that date. The amendment should be submitted 30 days prior to the UMCIRB approved expected end date or as soon as the Investigator is aware that the study will not be completed by that date.

APPENDIX B: PLAN SHEET AND RUBRIC

Name:	Project:	Date:	Approved:
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO MAKE: (Describe it)	WHAT SUPPLIES DO YOU NEED TO MAKE IT (LIST ALL)	SKETCH YOUR INSPIRATION OR IDEA HERE:	
DATES YOU WORKED ON IT	CHANGES TO ORIGINAL PLAN:	TITLE OF YOUR ARTWORK:	
ARTIST STATEMENT:	POSTED TO PORTFOLIO: ___ YES ___ NO	GRADE YOU THINK YOU SHOULD GET FROM USING THE RUBRIC	

EQ: WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS PROJECT ABOUT YOUR SUPPLY? _____

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	GOOD	OK	You could have done better	You didn't really try
<u>Creativity:</u> You made this your <u>original</u> artwork. It is not a copy of someone else's work.	5	4	3	2	1
<u>Craftsmanship:</u> Artwork is neat. There are no smudges, stray marks, or raggedy edges.	5	4	3	2	1
<u>Technique:</u> you used the supply the right way. You followed the procedures in the slide presentation.	5	4	3	2	1
<u>Learning:</u> You feel more confident using this supply for future projects because of what you learned with this project.	5	4	3	2	1
<u>Artistic Confidence:</u> You are proud of this artwork and feel good about it.	5	4	3	2	1
<u>Total Points x 4</u>					

APPENDIX C: CBAE PRE-QUIZ

CBAE Quiz

CBAE Pre-Quiz

* Indicates required question

1. Your Name:

2. How much do you know about all the supplies in the art room? *

20 points

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

a litt ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I know about most of them

3. What kind of artist do you think you are? *

20 points

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

terri ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ AMAZING

4. Do you like art class? *

20 points

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

not i ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I LOVE IT

APPENDIX D: CBAE POST-QUIZ

CBAE Quiz

CBAE Post Quiz

* Indicates required question

1. Your Name:

2. How much do you know about all the supplies in the art room? *

20 points

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

a litt ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I know about most of them

3. What kind of artist do you think you are? *

20 points

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

terri ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ AMAZING

4. Do you like art class? *

20 points

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

not i ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I LOVE IT

APPENDIX E: DAILY MOOD TRACKER

Daily Mood Tracker

Each day in class you will score yourself on your current mood based on the images below. Write this in your journal. Do it again at the end of class to show if the class improves your mood.

1	2	3
		
Happy Happy Happy	I'm good	Im a little off today
4	5	6
		
Meh.. I could be better	Ugh not feeling it	I'm done, over it

APPENDIX F: SUPPLY LIST

#	Media	Slide #	#	Media	Slide #
	Collage	2	27	Sewing	52
1	Drawing Pencils	3	28	Needle Felting	54
2	Colored Pencils	5	29	Paper Mache	56
3	Markers	7	30	Pottery Wheel	58
4	Watercolor Pencils	9	31	Weaving Yarn	60
5	Watercolor Paint	11	32	Gelli Printing	62
6	Acrylic Paint	13	33	Linoleum Printmaking	64
7	Cursive Signature	15	34	Knitting	66
8	Oil Pastels	16	35	Paper Quilling	68
9	Chalk	18	36	Sculpey	70
10	Charcoal	20	37	Watercolor Pens	72
11	Cardboard and Foam Printing	22	38	Papermaking	74
12	Bamboo Pen and India Ink	24	39	Leather Art	76
13	Suminagashi Black	26	40	Wax Batik (or glue)	78
14	Suminagashi Color	26	41	Wire Sculpture	80
15	Airbrush	28	42	Glass Fusing	82
16	Clay Pinch Pot	30	43	Enameling	84
17	Clay Coil Pot	32	44	Stained Glass	86
18	Clay Creature	34	45	Beados	88
19	Slab Pot	36	46	3-D Printing	90
20	Crochet	38	47	Calligraphy	92
21	Wood Burning	40	48	Screen Printing	94
22	Wood Carving	42	49	Friendship Bracelet	96
23	Bead Loom	44	50	Cross Stitch	98
24	Weaving Paper	46	51		
25	Pottery Glaze	48	52		
26	Cardboard Construction	50	53		