



Choice-Based Art Edited by Nan Hathaway

Choice-Based Art classrooms are working studios where students learn through authentic art making. Control shifts from teacher to learner as students explore ideas and interests in art media of their choice. This concept supports multiple modes of learning to meet the diverse needs of our students. Learn more at teachingforartisticbehavior.org.

ART GAMES AROUND THE ROOM

BY CYNTHIA GAUB

I can't believe it has been over 10 years since I began my Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) Choice-based art journey. When I started teaching art at my low-income, high-immigrant, urban population school in 2004, I was presented with classes that were filled with a mixture of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students.

In addition to the diverse emotional and physical age differences typical of this age-range, there was also learning diversity ranging from gifted to high learning needs, behavior issue kids and the severely physically challenged.

On top of that, there are no elementary art specialists in our district, so very few students come to me with developed art skills. Fortunately, I quickly found the TAB groups online and began my version of a modified-choice classroom. Working with themes and skill building units, my students can work at their own level and create work that has a high level of interest and engagement for them.

Over the years, I have vacillated on the spectrum between more teacher-controlled versus more student-directed curriculum. When I saw that my students lacked basic art knowledge and skills, I designed a way to quickly expose them to the variety of available materials, along with vocabulary and techniques for using them in a work of art. What I came up with is the idea of a teaching and learning strategy I call the "Around the Room" game.

IT BEGAN AT THE END OF A SCHOOL YEAR with a printmaking unit. Since my room has six giant tables, it was natural to have six learning centers. This idea has guided all my plans since then. Each table is set up with particular types of tools and materials along with some images, vocabulary and techniques that fit with that material. Students travel around the room participating in an activity I have set up at each table.

Depending on the media, these might be short 10-minute visits before rotating, or longer full-period sessions at each

station in turn. Students are not expected to create a finished art piece. More often, the task is a worksheet with a small box for artwork and an area for vocabulary or notes about the media. I grade students on effort and completeness.

After the rotation through all the centers, I have a "go back" day. Students who have completed all the requirements on the worksheet then have free choice to create a mini work of art using their favorite materials in that unit. Those that were absent during one of the rotations, or just need more time, can use this opportunity to return and complete the needed activity. I can see the level of excitement rise during the go back free choice time.

THESE AROUND-THE-ROOM GAMES have been so successful that I have created one for drawing, collage, paint, sculpture, clay, computers, printmaking, and the Artistic Behaviors. I use these introductions to officially "OPEN" a center. After students have completed the activity they are familiar with and can continue to use the materials in that center for the remainder of the year.

To start the term, I plan around the room games for three main 2-D centers; draw, paint and collage. Then students can select from those opened centers to create their first themed artwork. Usually I scaffold some brainstorming and other ways artist get ideas before I assign students a themed project.

Then, 3-D around the room units begin—featuring sculpture and clay. These are completed before I present the next theme. I always prepare demos of anything that I see students struggling with during their artwork-planning phase. I hold a one-on-one conference with each student prior to moving on to the final draft so that I can provide individualized resources and feedback.

Depending on the group and my timing, I might offer computer and printmaking. I also want to create a rotation for fiber and, in a couple years, for our new MakerSpace. Eventually students are comfortable enough with a wide variety of materials in the classroom that the themes become more and more student-driven.

Every year my class mix is a little different, so I always change things up to meet the needs of the new groups coming to me. These around the room units remain the best way I have found to introduce my students to the materials and techniques in their new art studio. ■

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Learn more about TAB Choice: teachingforartisticbehavior.org/
- View artwork by Cynthia's students on their Artsonia page: www.artsonia.com/schools/school.asp?id=70981
- To see more projects from her classroom, check out: www.artectivity.com

Cynthia Gaub teaches middle-school art, in Everett, Washington (an hour north of Seattle). She has been using modified TAB-Choice methods for over 10 years and writes on her blog: www.artectivity.com to share her "Around the Room" and themed units with fellow teachers.